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OLD!

RETRO* GAMER



No.1 for classic gaming

VOLUME TWO ISSUE THREE

>SYNTAX ERROR!

>MISSING COVERDISC?

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RETRO* GAMER



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The N64 classic slams onto the DS



Star Wars

X-Wing versus Dark Forces



MSX Appeal

The machine with a million faces



Kick Off Mania

Dino Dini's footy classic

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hello



Welcome once again to the hallowed halls of *Retro Gamer*, and Volume Two Issue Three of the best retro magazine around. It's been a busy month and we've been hard at work cramming in even more features, news and reviews. We've also been keenly following activity on the *RG* forum, and have noticed that a number of readers disagree with our coverage of modern PC and console titles. While we take the points raised onboard, we also believe that it's important to cover today's retro releases, be it a commercial remake, sequel or compilation. Of course, we will draw the line at some games, and you won't find reviews of any of Sonic the Hedgehog's new 3D adventures for example. But, new 2D versions that contain the same retro gameplay will very likely make it onto our pages. But, that said, if we find something interesting, then we think you will too, so why not allow us to indulge you?

Right, on with the show. This month we uncover the mysteries of the MSX computer range, delve into the history of Delta 4, developer of many fine adventure games, and complete our journeys through the Star Wars and Star Control universes. We also launch a number of new regular features, and we're especially keen to hear what you think of these additions to the magazine. Personal contact details are over on the left, or you may prefer to post feedback on our busy forum.

Enjoy the magazine!

MARTYN CARROLL
EDITOR

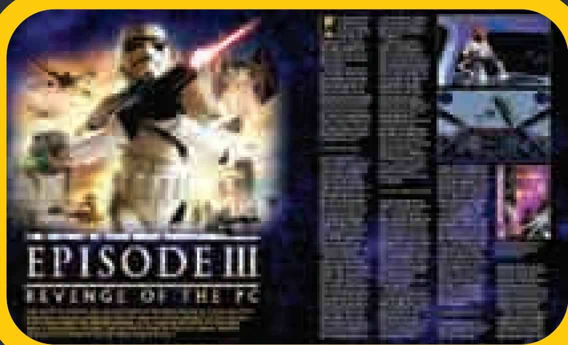


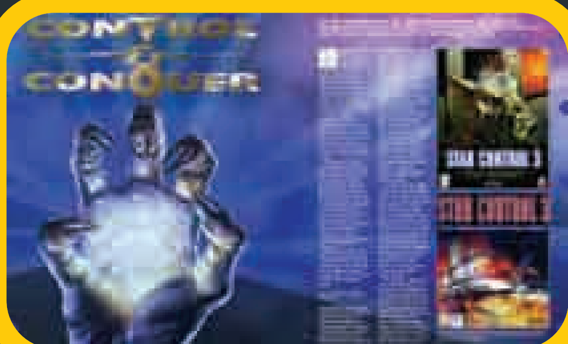
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RETRO NEWS

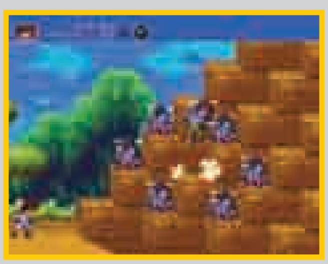
NEWS-OLA

Gunstars Reloaded

The definitive side-scrolling shooter returns



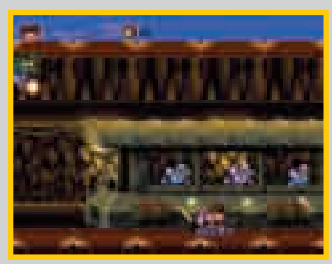




After reviving many classic properties already, Sega looks set to continue the trend with the resurrection of Gunstar Heroes. It's been revealed that Sega has recently registered the title 'Gunstar Super Heroes' as a trademark, making a huge hint that the epic and much admired Treasure blaster is due to make a return to our screens.

The original game first appeared on the Mega Drive in 1993 and was an instant hit. Pushing the Mega Drive to its limits, the game made usually smug SNES owners look on in green-eyed jealousy as the game performed more technical trickery and jiggery pokery than people thought possible on the Sega's little black box. Frantic action and an army of massive bosses populated this side-scrolling shooter, and the two player co-op was just bliss. Treasure made the best possible impact on the gaming world, with Gunstar Heroes perfectly demonstrating the team's talent for creating mind-blowing blasters, and arguably it's the best game on the Mega Drive.

Quite what the new release will have in store isn't known as Sega has yet to comment on the news. Will it be a sequel to the original? Will it be a remake of the original game, or will it be a totally different game with full 3D graphics like the recent Altered Beast update (let's hope not eh?) It's also not clear which platform the game will appear on, but we strongly suspect it will be a handheld release for the GBA or even the DS. Rest assured, as soon as we get more information, you'll know about it.



Sonic Overshadowed

Rival to take up the mantle





Following on from our story last month about Sega's online Sonic survey, it does seem, for the time being at least, that Sonic will be stepping out of the limelight. At a recent gaming event, Sega officially announced that the next Sonic game will not star the blue spiky one, but will instead place one of his rivals, Shadow the Hedgehog, at the helm.

The new game, currently titled Shadow the Hedgehog, will be a 3D platformer that takes place in a very Sonic-esque world, complete with the usual roller-coaster courses and loop-de-loops. But, don't expect this to be Sonic with different clothes, oh no. Shadow has some new tricks up his sleeve, most noticeably a bloody great gun! Yes, Shadow's packing some serious heat on his adventure, meaning that bopping foes on the head is a thing of the past. Quite how much this will change the core Sonic formula isn't really apparent at the moment, but from the footage we've seen, we're expecting more gameplay along the lines of Sonic Adventure, only with munitions and a much darker attitude.

The big question still remains though – where's Sonic?

Important happenings in the retro world

Capcom Classics Confirmed

Retro collections spark serious head scratching

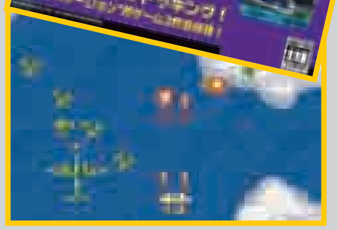


After announcing a new classics compilation in February, Capcom has finally revealed that it will release two retro bundles – volume 1 will feature 1942, 1943, 1943 Gaiden, while volume 2 will bring together Ghosts n' Goblins, Ghouls n' Ghosts and Super Ghouls n' Ghosts. Both packs will appear on the, er, PlayStation 1.

Sounds mildly interesting, except that Capcom has already released these packs for the PlayStation and Saturn in 1998. Back then they were known as Capcom Generations and there were five volumes in total. Volumes 1 and 2 were identical to the recently announced bundles, while volumes 3, 4 and 5 contained other classic Capcom titles including Commando, Gunsmoke and, of course, Street Fighter II. All five volumes were released separately in Japan, while the first four were bundled together and released in Europe as a single PlayStation pack simply entitled Capcom Generations (in case you're wondering, the fifth volume was released separately over here as Street Fighter Collection 2).

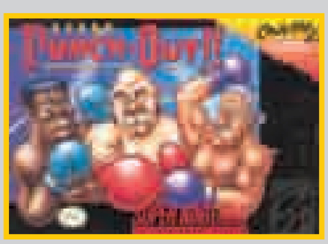
So why is Capcom releasing these titles again? Well, it's anybody's guess, although it seems to have something to do with a new strategy guide that will come bundled with each collection. It's unlikely that either volume will be released outside Japan, however, but at least this means we may be blessed with a new, fully-fledged Capcom collection somewhere down the line.

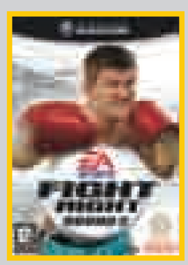




Super Final Punch-Out!!

Veteran heavyweight appears on Fight Night bill





A deal has been struck that combines EA's new Fight Night game with one of Nintendo's most popular old skool classics.

Fight Night Round II on the GameCube is set to give fans a dose of retro pugilistic action thanks to the inclusion of the Super Nintendo hit, Super Punch-Out!! This gem, which can be unlocked within the title, will only be available in the GameCube version of the game. But, that's not all, as EA and Nintendo have come up with even more cameo appearances. Owners of the GameCube version of NBA Street V3 can unlock a special all-star team featuring none other than Mario, Luigi, and Princess Peach! Although, we're not sure exactly how 'street' Princess Peach will be, but it's gotta be worth the asking price to see her slam dunking it with the best of them.

Jet Set Go!

Miner Willy takes to the tracks

Back in Retro Gamer issue 12 we hinted that the next Miner Willy game for mobile phones *might just be* a Mario Kart style racer. To tell you the truth, we knew full well that this was the case, but our hands were tied until the deal had been done. Well, said deal has been done, and Jet Set Karting will be appearing on mobile phones towards the end of the year. Details are a little thin on the ground at present, but we gather you'll be able to choose one of several characters from the game besides Willy, and the tracks will all be based around locations in Willy's mansion. We should know more in the next couple of months. In the meantime, this early development screenshot should provide a taster as to what you can expect.



Play Again

Retro focus shifts to mobile phones

UK software publisher Play It has announced its move into the mobile gaming market recently with its new Play It Mobile label. The label will feature titles specifically designed for phones. Amongst the first wave of releases will be retro classics James Pond II: Robocod, Strikers 1945 and the ever-popular International Karate (how the controls lend themselves to mobile handsets remains to be seen however).

Meanwhile, Play It's new Last Ninja game for PS2 and Xbox seems to have dropped out of sight, with Internet rumours suggesting that the two year project has been cancelled. Also AWOL is the original Last Ninja trilogy which was due to appear on consoles towards the end of last year. Hopefully we'll have some more optimistic Ninja news in the coming months.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

Retro Gamer turns the clock back exactly 20 years to April 1985 – a month for new computers, dying software houses and April Showers

Amstrad revealed its brand new computer to the world this month. The CPC 664 was basically a 464 with tweaked Locomotive Basic and the addition of a built-in 3in disk drive rather than the standard tape deck. The system would come complete with a choice of colour or monochrome monitor and would set you back £449 for the colour version or £339 for the green screen model. The machine was generally well received by the computing press, yet it would be discontinued before the year was out and replaced by the 6128, a model with twice the memory.

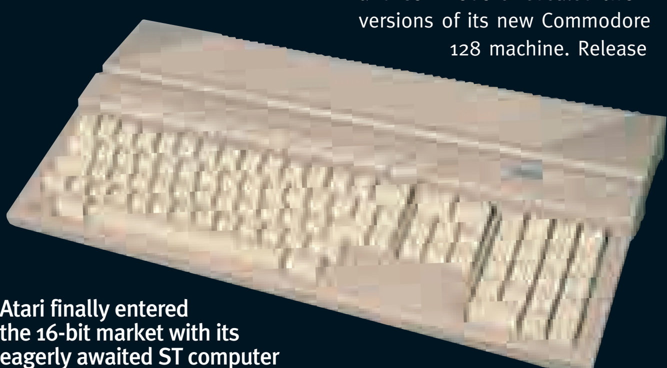
Meanwhile at the Hanover Fair in Germany, home of one of the biggest electronics and computer shows of the year, Atari and Commodore were showing off their own brand new machines which were making their debuts on the European computer market. Atari demonstrated its highly anticipated Atari 520ST and Commodore revealed two versions of its new Commodore 128 machine. Release dates for all the machines still remained in limbo – late summer was the best guess. Although not publicly shown at the fair, Commodore also revealed that it hoped to have its next project, the Amiga, ready for sale in the UK by the end of the year...

Continuing with the Commodore theme, a new magazine from Newfield Publications made its first appearance on the newsstand at the end of the month. The May edition of *Zzap! 64* had a terrific welcome from Commodore gamesters and quickly built an army-like following. There will be more on *Zzap's* first issue next month.

Of course, being April it wouldn't be right if at least one of the computer magazines didn't attempt to dupe us with a belting April Fool's Day prank. The best of the bunch came from Your Spectrum with a teaser for Jet Set Willy fans. In issue 13 YS revealed to the Willy mad world that it had discovered the existence of a secret location. The room, entitled April Showers, could only be activated by typing in a short program listed in the magazine. In reality this program was the new room itself but it still hoodwinked many readers. This new 61st room was reprogrammed to appear over The Beach and has become a nice addition to JSW folklore.

Steer well clear

With the Soft Aid charity compilation riding high in the software charts, with approximately 40,000 copies of it being sold since its release the



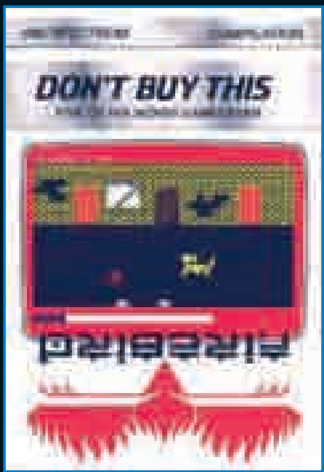
Atari finally entered the 16-bit market with its eagerly awaited ST computer

›C5 Clive



The transport of the future, the Sinclair C5, hit the news for all the wrong reasons after it was revealed a faulty part had to be replaced in the vehicle. Up to 3,000 C5s were affected.

Sales figures for the C5 since its release on January 10th revealed that 5,000 units had been sold, mostly by mail order direct from the Hoover factory in Merthyr Tydfyl. OK, so the C5 may have been produced at Hoover – yep, the same Hoover that makes vacuum cleaners and washing machines – and it did little in persuading you it was safe, particularly when confronted with an articulated lorry belching exhaust fumes in your face. It's also fair to say that you were unlikely to ever pull anything in one except for maybe your hamstring. But if there's a finer plasticized, pedal-driven/electric-powered tricycle on the roads, we have yet to see it...



"Don't buy this!" pleaded Firebird, but lots of stupid people actually did just that

previous month, budget game masters Firebird decided it was time to release a compilation of its own.

Although it's fairly usual to find games compilations padded out with the occasional dud or sub-standard game, Firebird planned to go all out and be as completely and utterly rubbish as it possibly could be. The infamous Don't Buy This was a selection of shockingly pitiful gaming offerings for the Spectrum. The programmers behind the dross were even kept anonymous such was the shocking work of these mediocre programming makeweights. The role call of despair featured such blighted offerings as Weasel Willy, Race Ace, Fruit Machine, Fido, and as if the first wasn't bad enough, Fido 2.

With the release date of the compilation set for April 1st, the majority of people dismissed the whole thing as one big April Fool's Day stunt. It came as a bit of a shock then when it appeared in the shops, priced at £2.50 as part of Firebird's cheapo Silver Range. Not only did it label itself as "Five of the worst games ever", but it inexplicably sold by the shed load.

Was this a case of bluff and double bluff with a garnish of genius marketing? Or was it just us curious gamers wanting to see if the whole thing was stuff and nonsense and actually as bad as Firebird had made out? Whatever the reasoning was behind it, Don't Buy This sold extremely well.

Firebird continued to be newsworthy with the announcement that it was to release Acornsoft's Elite on the Commodore 64. After originally obtaining the rights to all 8-bit versions of Elite via an auction, Firebird pursued Acornsoft for use of the Elite trademarks. With that agreed, Firebird confirmed that the C64 version of Elite would appear within a month or two, with the Amstrad CPC and ZX Spectrum versions making a belated autumnal appearance.

The Quick and the dead

Also in this month, Quicksilva announced that it would be shifting its operation to London from its home in Southampton. It would now be sharing premises with its parent company, Argus Press Software. Although Argus pointed out that the move was more for convenience than anything else, it seemed like the beginning of the end for Quicksilva, one of the longest running and most successful software houses. With the added news that all Quicksilva staff had been made redundant, it certainly seemed the end was coming for one of the pioneers of 8-bit gaming.

There was also bad news for another big software house as Bug Byte, another old timer, confirmed that it had become insolvent and would be liquidated.

And that was April 1985.

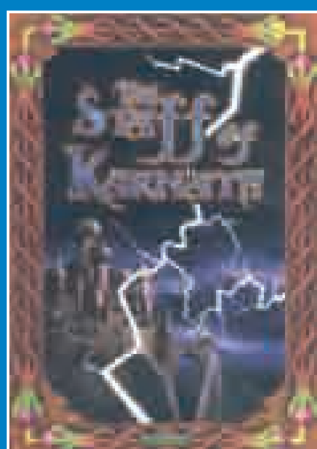
›Games watch

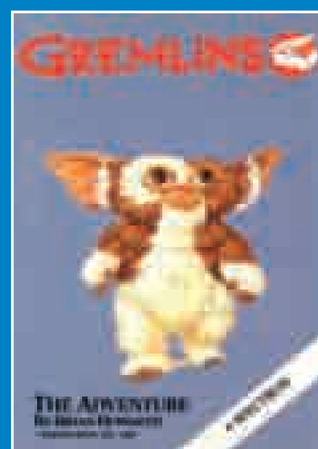
Adventure International released Gremlins in this month. Based on the popular film featuring a furry little Mogwai called Gizmo and the world's fastest Stannah Stairlift, the graphic adventure was released for a multitude of formats and allowed gamers to microwave and liquidise Gremlins freely without guilt. Hurrah!

Computer & Video Games **magazine featured two great offerings for the Commodore 64 in its review pages. Impossible Mission (Epyx/US Gold) was the star of the show with an overall 10/10 rating. The C&VG staff also reviewed Staff Of Karnath (Ultimate), giving it Star Game status although it only scored 8/10.**

It was a busy month for C64 owners, with a multitude of US Gold releases for their system including Bounty Bob Strikes Back, Congo Bongo and Grog's Revenge, while simulation freaks were given the chance blow stuff up in Theatre Europe (PSS).

Crash **magazine carried reviews of The Dukes Of Hazzard (Elite), sadly without any mention of Daisy Duke's frayed denim shorts. The Speccy bible also looked at Sam Stoat Safebreaker (Gremlin), The Tripods (Red Shift), Raid Over Moscow (US Gold) and Pud Pud (Ocean). Alien 8 (Ultimate) was also finally reviewed and received a superbly high 95% and a Crash Smash award. Well done Robbie Robot!**





›Top Five Charts (April 1985)

Commodore 64	Spectrum	Amstrad CPC	BBC Micro
1 Soft Aid (Quicksilva)	1 Soft Aid (Quicksilva)	1 Sorcery (Virgin)	1 Football Manager (Addictive Games)
2 Chiller (Firebird)	2 Booty (Firebird)	2 Ghostbusters (Activision)	2 Mr EE (Micropower)
3 BMX Racers (Mastertronic)	3 Raid Over Moscow (US Gold)	3 Fighter Pilot (Digital Integration)	3 Castle Quest (Micropower)
4 Booty (Firebird)	4 Bruce Lee (US Gold)	4 Jet Set Willy (Software Projects)	4 Challenger (Mastertronic)
5 Airwolf (Elite)	5 Daley Thompson's Decathlon (Ocean)	5 Flight Path 737 (Anirog)	5 Scrabble (Leisure Genius)

Game of the Month

Your mission, should you choose to except it, is to play Impossible Mission, one of the finest C64 games of all time...

Seen the movie *Wargames,* but unlike cheeky-faced computer hacker Matthew Broderick, don't fancy starting a game of global thermonuclear war? Does the soundtrack to *Mission Impossible* make you want to don a beige mac, tinted sunglasses and communicate in code? If so, your dreams have just come true – well, some of them anyway.

The almost legal-eagle enticing Impossible Mission casts you not as Ethan Hunt, but as a top secret spy who's on a mission to save the world from Professor Elvin Atombender (and with a name like that, it's no surprise he became an crazed mastermind hell-bent on world domination). He's up to no good, using his villainous skills to hack into national security computer systems. Should he gain total control, who knows what the evil megalomaniac would do next?

So, with a freshly-ironed shirt, pressed action slacks and a handy secret agent computer, you sneak into Atombender's secret base to uncover his plans and infiltrate his computer system, hopefully stopping his plans dead. But, don't forget about his automated security systems!

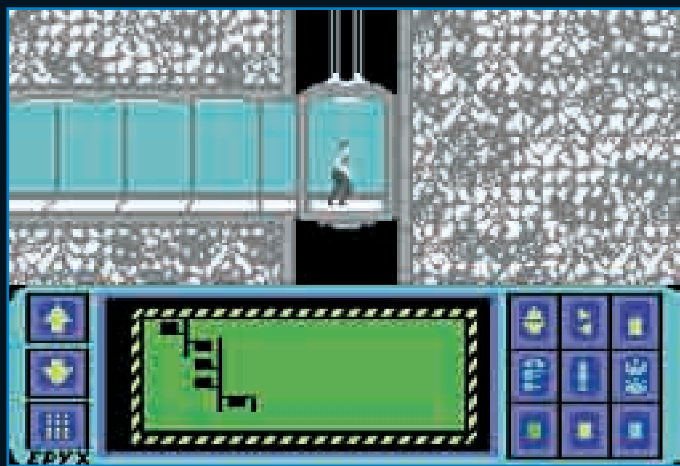
Okay, so the plot is right out of a Saturday morning cartoon, but that's not important. What's important is that Epyx, and creator Dennis Caswell, crafted a game that was head and shoulders above almost every other title out there at the time. Impossible Mission is a game that works on many different levels, the foundations of which are action platforming. As the spy, you have to navigate the secret base, somersaulting over foes and gaps, and using lifts to reach other areas. You also have to avoid Atombender's army of robots, as well as surviving his deviously constructed chambers. While progressing through the labyrinthine complex you need to search desks, bookcases and tables to find clues to Atombender's secret code. You can also use computers to hack into the base security system, shutting down patrol robots and resetting lifts, and there are even puzzles which must be solved to gain useful items.

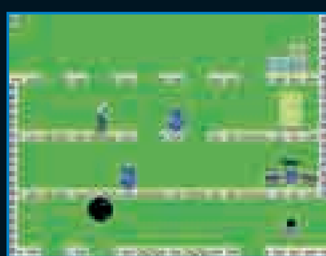
But that's not all. No spy worth his salt would leave home without a cutting edge toy or two, and this is no exception. Your own computer system can be used to collect together the pieces of the final code, and you can also use it to contact your HQ and map your route through the base.

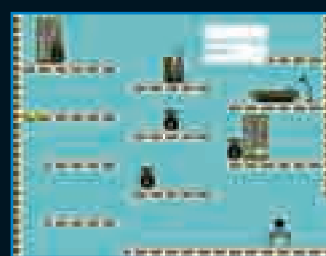
Not only is the game completely innovative and surprisingly complex, but it features some truly impressive character animation. Your spy runs fluidly and somersaults like a gymnastics pro (well, this is an Epyx game). Not only that, but the game also changes every time you play it – with rooms and objects moving to random positions. There's also some excellent speech thrown in for good measure.

Simply put, Impossible Mission is a game that was far ahead of its time, and one that simply needs to be experienced by every self-respecting gamer. Awesome stuff, and a bona fide classic.

Developer:	**Epyx**
Format:	**C64**
Price:	**£8.99**
Players:	**One**
SCORE:	**9/10**







›You only play twice

Having braved the perils of Atombender's secret base, our super spy returned for one more adventure. Impossible Mission II once again featured the mad professor, only this time his complex was divided into towers, and you had eight hours to stop him from destroying the world.

Once again the game featured stunning animation and complex gameplay. Instead of finding the secret code, this time you had to find parts of a musical tune. IM2 also featured improved psudeo-3D visuals, and you could now find weapons with which you could fight back against those pesky robots.

Many consider the sequel to be inferior to the original, but there's no denying that it was still an excellent game in its own right.



eMag

Retro Rated

Welcome to the *Retro Gamer* reviews section. Read on to discover the team's opinion on the latest commercial releases...

Atari Flashback



Relive Atari's golden age of gaming with this Mini-Me-sized incarnation of the 7800 ProSystem console

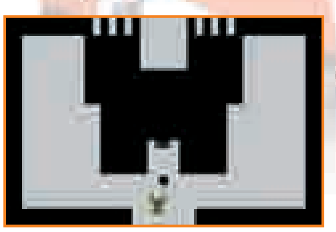
Developer: Atari **Format:** N/A **Price:** £29.99 **Players:** One-Two



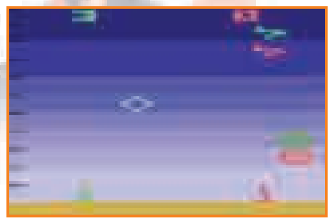
It had to happen eventually. After sitting back and watching the likes of Radica and Jakks Pacific unleash all manner of classic games on new TV plug 'n' play gadgets, with others such as Sega and Namco licensing out their properties and reaping the rewards, Atari has decided to enter the fray on its own. And what an entrance!

Here we have the Atari Flashback, a miniature sized Atari 7800, complete with two mini ProLine controllers. Inside the console lurks 20 of Atari's original games for both the 2600 and 7800 systems (15 titles for the former and five for the latter, to be exact). As you'd expect, classics such as Battlezone, Adventure, Centipede, Breakout and Asteroids are all included. You even get the chance to play Saboteur, an Atari game written by the famed programmer Howard Scott Warshaw that was never officially released (although it has since been leaked onto the Net).

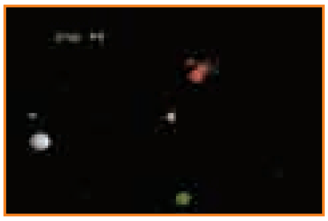
For Atari enthusiasts, this surely sounds like the best thing ever, and we've no doubt that fans will lap up the collection of games on offer. After plugging the unit into your TV and powering it up, you can select any of the available games from the main menu, providing quick and easy access to 20 old favourites. But, and this is said with a very heavy heart, it's here where things start to go south, in a very big way.



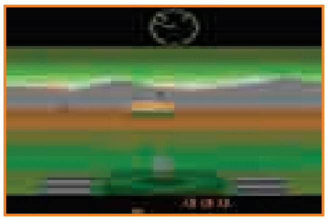
Adventure



Air Sea Battle

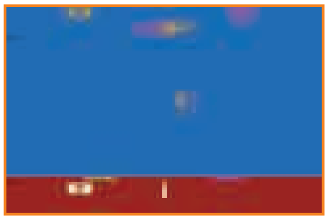


Asteroids (7800)

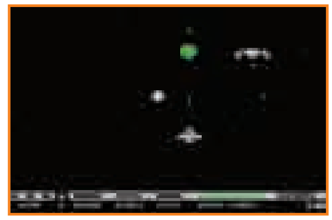


Battlezone


Solaris

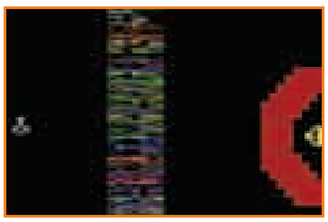

Sky Diver


Saboteur


Planet Smashers (7800)


Sprintmaster


Warlords


Yar's Revenge

Down and out

The first thing you'll notice is the sluggishness of the controllers. They react very… slowly… to commands, with even menu selections being unresponsive and slow. Then, when you do get into a game proper, the overall level of control isn't great. Now we know that Atari's controllers have never been anything particularly special, but they're surely better than this! Not only is the control sluggish, but the actual controllers are very poorly made, in both construction quality and in design. Because of the small and thin shape, it's not long before your hands will start to seize up and ache, thanks to the unnatural way you need to hold the joysticks. And the joysticks feel so light you'll be scared you'll break them with any form of assertive gameplay (thankfully, there are no Track & Field style games, or you'd definitely be left with a broken peripheral – ouch!)

Okay, so the controllers aren't great, but it's the games that are important, right? Well, yes, but that's also a bit of a problem. Although there are many classic titles on offer here, the selection only encompasses Atari's own back catalogue. This means that old favourites like Pitfall, River Raid, Frogger, Space Invaders and Pac-Man are not included. This is a big downside to the Flashback, and Atari really should have taken time to secure some of the more fondly remember titles.

While on the subject of the games, it's sad that only five 7800 games have been included, especially when the whole unit has been mocked up to look like miniature 7800. The 2600 really has been milked dry over the years, and there have been other TV game releases catering for the more successful unit, so surely this would have been a fantastic opportunity to focus exclusively on the comparatively powerful ProSystem. A collection of all of Atari's 7800 games would have fitted the bill perfectly, making this a truly unique device that could stand on its own two feet.

Fond memories

But, having said all that, we can't really bring ourselves to hate the Flashback. Sitting down in front of the TV with almost perfect reproductions of Battlezone, Asteroids and Adventure doesn't fail to bring back the memories, and for this alone the Flashback deserves some praise. Plus, all of the games included are replicated perfectly, retaining all the charm and appeal of the originals. Saying that, some titles such as Warlords have been redone slightly, with changes to accommodate the unit's lack of four-player support.

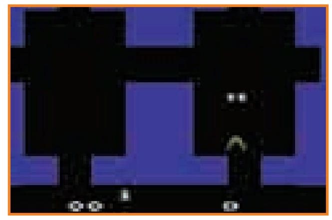
It's just a crying shame more quality and not quantity went into the Flashback's development. If so, we would have had a far better unit. It may be a better idea for fans who own a PC or modern console to invest in a copy of Atari Anthology, which not only features a whopping 62 2600 titles, but also 18 of Atari's greatest arcade hits. And as you can pick this collection up for around a tenner, you're laughing. Nice try Atari, but better luck next time.

Rating:

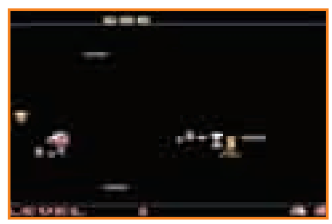
›Mix 'n' match

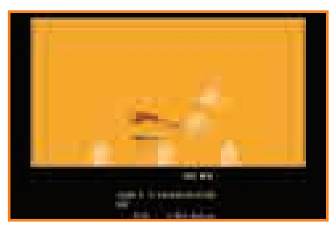
As you've no doubt read in our review, we're none too happy with the Flachback's controllers. However, as the unit actually boasts the original 9-pin sockets from the 7800, we thought a way around the problem would be to use the original 7800's joysticks. When plugged in, the controllers *do* work, but the inputs are not correctly mapped, with the joystick pausing the game and the fire button doing nothing. The chance to use your own old sticks would have been a bit of a bonus, and we're sure that hardcore tech heads out there will be able to rewire the inputs to support this, but for the rest of us, we're stuck with the Flashback's own sticks. Shame.


Millipede


Haunted House

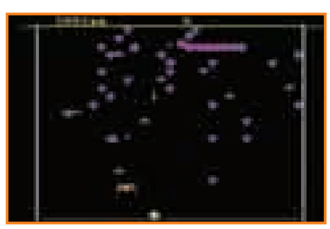

Gravitar


Food Fight (7800)


Desert Falcon (7800)


Breakout

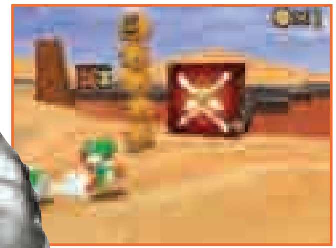

Canyon Bomber

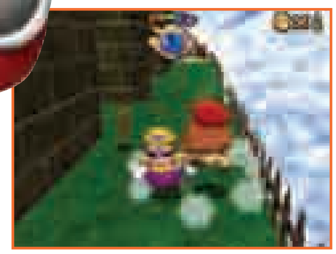

Centipede (7800)


Crystal Castles

Super Mario 64 DS

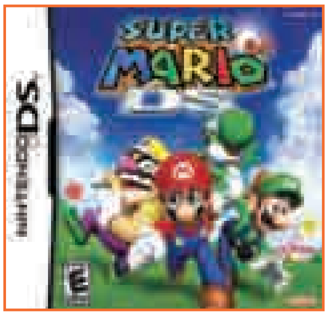






Mario's landmark 3D adventure resurrected as a DS launch title. How could it possibly fail?

Developer: Nintendo **Format:** Nintendo DS **Price:** £29.99 **Players:** One-Four



Nintendo seems to have been struggling with Mario recently. Super Mario Sunshine was full of great ideas, but never really struck a chord with the fans who longed for the true sequel to Super Mario 64, whilst the tentatively-titled Super Mario 128 has remained out of the public eye for two hardware generations. In the meantime Nintendo has failed to placate its fervent followers by refusing to create a brand new 2D Mario platformer for the Game Boy Advance. You have to ask the question – is Nintendo capable of bettering the oft-cited 'best game ever made'?

Its reliance on Mario 64 to sail them through the DS launch schedule suggests that perhaps it isn't. Super Mario 64 DS then, provokes contradictory emotions: it's disappointing that the innovative handheld has not launched with an original Mario game, but on the other hand it is quite exciting to be able to play the game that changed everything anywhere you like. Mario 64's influence on the modern gaming scene has been so strong that it is difficult to judge it as a retro game. The complete control of Mario's every hop, leap, crawl, sprint, back flip, tip-toe, climb, swim, fly and slide has so far gone unrivalled by not only Nintendo themselves but every modern videogame developer since. This leaves Mario 64 feeling as fresh as it did in 1996 with only its graphics and sound revealing its true age.

As suggested, it's the control that made Mario 64 such a revolution in the first place so it's sad to see that it is control that makes the DS conversion a slight disappointment. The problem is that neither of the DS's input methods suits the style of the nine-year-old platform game. The stubborn D-pad is so unsuitable for 3D movement that its use should be made a crime whereas the thumb strap (a flat stylus that sits under the thumb) affords much more freedom of movement but is a little inaccurate because of the touch screen's lack of a definite stopping point. Neither method feels as natural or responsive as the N64's analogue stick and, although they are adequate enough to get you through the game, there are a few advanced techniques and tricks that are almost impossible on the handheld set-up: a fact that will frustrate many N64 aficionados.

Mario all-stars

Control issues aside, the DS improves on Mario 64 in every possible way. The new levels range from simple landscapes (like the tropical island where Mario must catch a vulture to get the star) to the complex three dimensional playgrounds that have been the highlight of Mario's 3D adventures. The additional characters meanwhile, add a whole new dimension to the gameplay. Apart from inflating himself and floating around, Mario's moves are much the same as in the classic N64 version and the other three characters have their own moves that allow them to traverse the old levels in new ways. Luigi can jump higher, run on water and walk through walls; Yoshi can swallow enemies, breathe fire and lob eggs; and Wario can break immovable objects and turn to metal.

The very beginning of the game opens with the player attempting to defeat the first boss with Yoshi, whose unique abilities force the player to discover new ways of defeating an enemy that they would otherwise have been familiar enough with to trounce easily. This trend continues throughout; the fire flower power-up for example will bestow a different ability depending on who collects it. This essentially means that





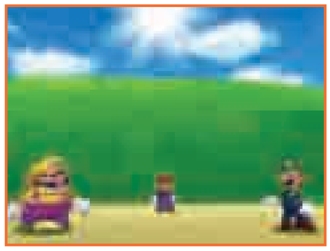


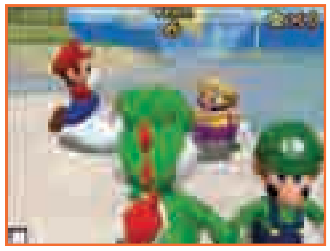


many levels can be played in four different ways, couple this with the thirty extra power stars and you have a game whose longevity far exceeds that of the original. The other consequence is that of added value for those who know the original inside and out: no level is 100% identical to its original counterpart and gives the Mario 64 veteran a sense of discovery that is absent from other re-releases of this kind.

The port is bolstered further still by the addition of new mini-games and a multiplayer mode. The former are collected by catching yellow rabbits throughout the main adventure and make full use of the DS's touch screen. Some are pointless distractions while the others are the type of simple, score-attack games that will see you losing hours without realising. Most importantly, each one shows off







the DS's potential in an appropriate manner. Sadly the same cannot be said about the multiplayer mode. Although it admirably allows four players to Wi-Fi link together, the whole game is over in a matter of seconds and takes the form of a battle mode that doesn't really suit the Mario 64 style of play. A co-operative mode would have surely been much more appropriate and engaging.

The DS' slight technological superiority over the N64 has been used to sharpen up the original graphics and hammer out a few of the kinks: the textures for example are notably improved and suffer from none of the blurriness that infamously plagued many N64 games. Although purists may argue that the visuals should stay the same as the original, in this case they would be wrong; this is what Mario 64 would have looked like all along if the N64 was capable of presenting it properly. Nintendo has also rather cannily rendered the brand new levels and locations in a similar style to the standard ones; making them indistinguishable from the genuine article. If you have never played Mario 64 before (you nutter) then you really won't be able to tell which are the old levels and which are new.

Link to the past

Music has an uncanny ability to provoke nostalgia in people: when you hear a song you haven't heard in years and your mind back flips to the time when it was most popular it can create a feeling of comfort unlike any other. Videogame music is no

›Super Mario 128?

As far back as 1999, Shigeru Miyamoto was talking about a sequel to Super Mario 64, and once said: "For over a year now at my desk, a prototype program of Luigi and Mario has been running on my monitor. We've been thinking about the game, and it may be something that could work on a completely new game system". That sequel never materialised, so it is possible that the new system he refers to is the DS and that many of the ideas he had for a sequel found their way into Super Mario 64 DS. That may not be the case though and it is also possible that the game evolved into the as yet unreleased Super Mario 128, which may or may not be a Revolution launch title. Our breath is bated...

different, so it's fantastic that Nintendo has gotten the sound in Mario 64 DS just right. Every classic Koji Kondo track is reproduced perfectly and plays remarkably well through the DS's tiny stereo speakers. As soon as the steel drums kick in on the title screen you'll be instantly transported to a time when 3D graphics were exciting, when Sega still made games consoles and when Electronic Arts didn't own everyone under the sun. There's something magic about that and it certainly helps that those original tunes were all exceptional tracks to begin with.

In fact everything about Mario 64 was exceptional to begin with and that is the greatest achievement of Mario 64 DS: the entire game plus extras has been squeezed onto a tiny game card and can be enjoyed anywhere in the entire world. With this re-release Nintendo has taken an already excellent game and, despite the lack of an analogue stick, has enhanced the package for both veterans and newcomers alike. This is the way all retro re-releases should be done: with respect for the original artefact and with enough new features to make it surprising for those who were there the first time.

Rating:





Ridge Racer DS

Namco's flagship racing series powerslides onto the DS, going head to head with its opposite number on the Sony PSP

Developer: Namco **Format:** Nintendo DS **Price:** £29.99 **Players:** One-Six



It's something of a surprise that Nintendo should want a title like Ridge Racer among its DS launch line-up. After all, the series has been shrewdly used by Sony to showcase the graphical capabilities of all its consoles to date (including the PSP, but more on that later). Nintendo has never boasted about the DS's capacity for pushing polygons or crunching numbers. No, the DS is all about touch and feel and control. So what's a flashy-pants racer like this doing here?

If we were sceptical, we'd suggest it was chosen because every console must launch with at least one racing game in its line-up, and Ridge Racer was an easy option from a porting point of view. After all, the DS seems perfectly capable of running N64 titles, and Ridge Racer DS is essentially a port of Ridge Racer 64, a worthy update to the long-running series that was originally released in 2000. If you're unfamiliar with RR64, the game basically takes the tracks from the original Ridge Racer and its sequel, Ridge Racer Revolution, throws in a brand new track, and presents you with a simple 20-race Grand Prix mode. As you win races, new track variations are unlocked and faster cars can be competed for. In each successive race, the AI cars become more and more competitive (and later on damn right aggressive), so despite the limited number of tracks and lack of customisable options, the GP mode is surprisingly demanding. You certainly won't race through the game in a day.

Unlike Mario 64 DS, which is very much an enhanced version of the original game, Namco has merely rolled the old motor out of the garage with barely a lick of new paint. The game is essentially the same, with changes seemingly enforced to support the DS's dual screen display and touch screen control method. The racing action takes place in the top screen while the lower screen displays race information (the course map, lap times etc.) and features a laughably large steering wheel. When using the D-pad, the wheel is there purely for show, but it's possible to actually turn it using either the stylus or wrist strap. It sounds a bit mad and indeed it is – we gave both alternative control methods our best shot but we were soon tapping our way around each track using the D-pad. Call us old fashioned – we *really* don't mind.



›Six pack

For the first time in a Ridge Racer game, up to six players can race against each other at the same time. This is all thanks to the DS's wireless multiplayer capabilities, and best of all, only one copy of the game is required (the other players simply download track data from the host). In our opinion, these multiplayer races are the key to the game's long-term appeal.

Slide away

Control changes aside, everything pretty much remains the same. And when you consider that RR64 kept true to the original's roots, this is a fine thing if you're a fan of arcade racers. In fact, it's that long since we've played a Ridge Racer game that we'd forgotten how much fun is to be had taking corners at breakneck speeds with your car 90 degrees to the racing line, tires squealing, viewpoint spinning, followed by the sweet speed boost you receive for performing the perfect powerslide. It's also amazing how the familiarity of each track comes flooding back, and if you've played the earlier arcade or PlayStation games for any length or time, you'll instinctively know how to approach every corner – when to ease off, when to open up. The track design really is spot on, making for perhaps the perfect arcade racer. And the lack of tedious car-tweaking options is a welcome breath of fresh air.

But we end where we begin, with Ridge Racer on Sony's consoles. We've had the opportunity to play Ridge Racer on the PSP, and it's infinitely better that the DS effort. Rather than a straight port, it's almost like a Ridge Racer greatest hits package, with every incarnation of the game included. It really does leave RRDS standing on the starting grid, and makes you wonder why Namco didn't lavish the same amount of care and attention on this version. Let's hope that this is not the shape of things to come in the handheld market.

Rating:

Puyo Pop Fever

The latest game in the long running Puyo Puyo series hits the GameBoy Advance, and it's feverish!

Developer: Sega **Format:** GBA **Price:** £24.99 **Players:** One-Four

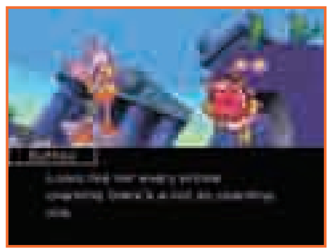


If you're not familiar with the series, Puyo Puyo is a Japanese puzzler along the same lines as Columns and Tetris. Most western gamers will have seen that game already without knowing it, under the guise of Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine, which was simply a westernised version of the original Puyo Puyo.

The game concept is simple – drop the various coloured beans into your play area and try to form groups of four or more to eliminate them. Groups can be straight lines, blocks or more elaborate configurations, as beans of the same colour stick together when they touch. The real skill here though is the creation of chains, setting up multiple groups of colours, so that they are all eliminated one by one in a domino-like effect. When you clear beans from your screen, colourless beans are dropped on your opponent, filling up their area. The first person to have their area completely filled with beans loses.







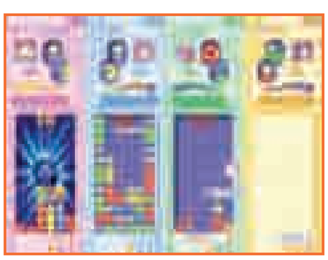
Puyo Puyo is simple retro puzzling at its very best, and over the years has seen a number of instalments, including the most recent Puyo Pop Fever on the Dreamcast, PS2 and Xbox. Here we have the latest GBA version of the game, and you know what? It's great!

Puzzle games like this are one of the GBA's strengths, and this conversion of the console title is handled very well indeed. Graphically everything is here, with all the characters and even the 3D-looking beans and psychedelic 'Fever' mode effects making an appearance. Obviously, all of these are scaled down, but the reproduction is almost perfect. The audio is passable, with the main theme tune bouncing along in the background, and much of the character speech samples are in there.

Fever pitch

The key to any puzzle game is in the playability, and thankfully Puyo Pop Fever on the GBA has more than enough to offer. All of the game modes are present and correct, including the Story Mode, Free Game, Endless Mode (just keep on going to get a high score) and, of course, Fever Mode.







This is where the game gets its name, and in all modes, if you successfully hold off your opponents' counter attacks (by eliminating beans when there are colourless ones ready to fall on you), you'll enter Fever Mode. Here you get a preset chain of beans, and you simply need to place one bean in the right place to cause total havoc with your foe's stack.

The game also makes full use of the GBA's link-up ability, and you can play the game with up to four players, which as with any puzzler, is where the game comes into its own. And with you and your mates throwing beans around like there's no tomorrow, Puyo Pop Fever becomes one of the most enjoyable puzzlers around.

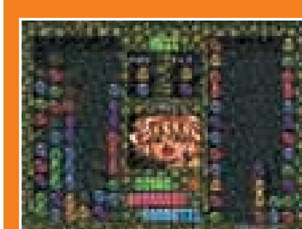
While the game isn't going to win any awards for originality or innovation, there's no denying that it's an addictive game and the GBA is the perfect platform for such a title. Those long train journeys will just fly by if you fire this up.

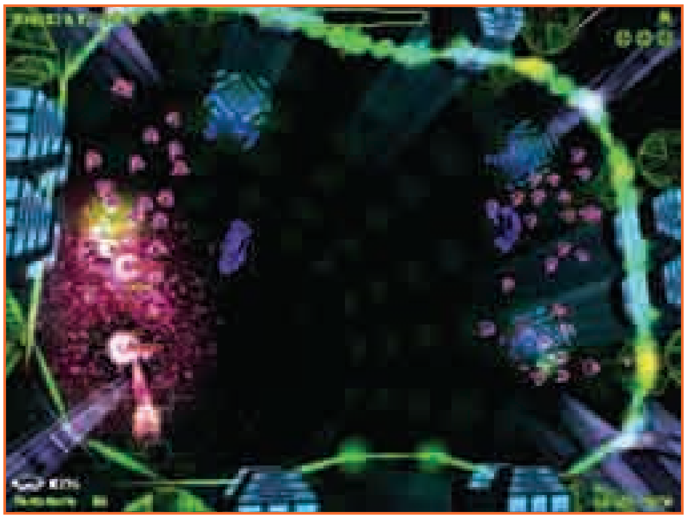
Rating:

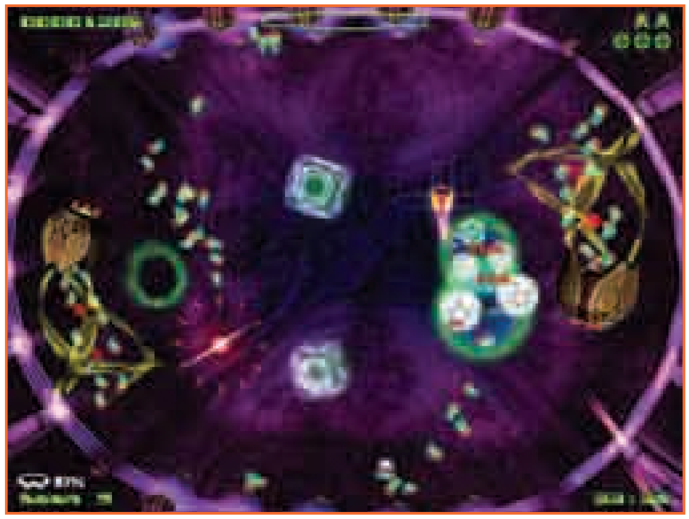
›Bean feast

Puyo Puyo wasn't always such a well known title and was originally released by Compile in 1991 for the MSX2. It was then followed by a special version for the Famicom Disk System, called Puyo Puyo Disk Drive. The characters starring in the game were from Madou Monogatari, an RPG also created by Compile. However, Puyo Puyo didn't make it big until it appeared in the arcades in 1992. Adding a story mode to the proceedings, players could now battle through increasingly difficult foes, and could also challenge their mates with the two player mode.

Over the years the game has been released in many forms on systems including the SNES, Mega Drive, GameGear, GameBoy, PC, PlayStation, Xbox and Mac. However, many western ports don't bear the title Puyo Puyo, and instead use more familiar western names, with such titles as Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine, Kirby's Avalanche and Candy Crisis. Puyo Pop Fever was also the last game Sega released for the Dreamcast.



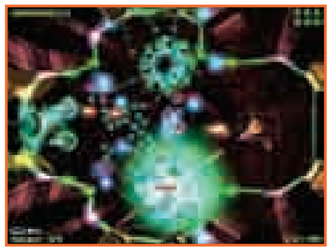


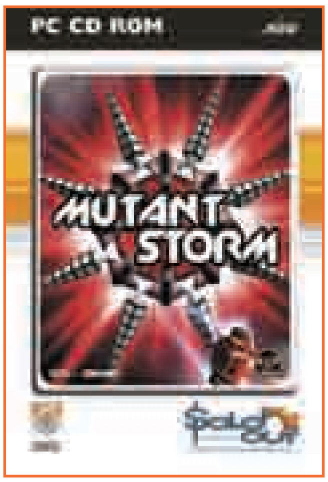


Mutant Storm

Take your optic nerves for a spin in this hectic disco inferno blaster. Groovy baby!

Developer: Pom Pom **Format:** PC/Mac **Price:** £4.99 **Players:** One-Two





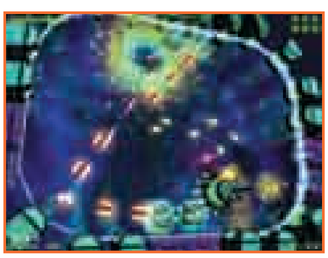
Last month we reviewed Space Tripper, the Uridium-inspired blaster from Pom Pom games. Ditching the usual attempts to make bold leaps forward in gaming technology, with Space Tripper Pom Pom focused on pure gameplay, and the results were excellent.

Well, now we've got another offering from Pom Pom, re-released under the Sold Out budget range. Mutant Storm is an arcade blaster that once more relies on unadulterated arcade action. Perhaps the best way to describe the game would be to imagine the classic shooter Smash TV crossed with arcade favourite Robotron, with a little dash of Tempest 2000 thrown in for good measure. It makes for a tasty mixture that's perfect for snacking on.

Starting off the game, you choose your ship and colour, and then dive off into 89 increasingly difficult enemy waves. Each level takes place in a sealed area, and enemies beam in from all angles. Controlling the ship is one of Mutant Storm's greatest qualities. Using a combination of keyboard and mouse, you move the ship around the game zones at a very fast pace. The keyboard moves the ship and the mouse controls the aiming reticule (if you've played the freeware gem Abuse you'll know how this works). After a few goes the control system becomes second nature, although a good level of ambidextrous skill is needed.

In each level you'll come up against masses of varied enemies. Some foes simply wander around the arena, whereas some will actively make a beeline for you, determined to smash you into atoms. Many enemies are small and attack in waves, while other foes weigh in at much larger sizes, and some are even invincible, functioning as immovable obstacles. As you combat wave after wave of alien nasties, you'll can acquire more powerful weapons and defensive measures, and you can also rely on your limited number of smart bombs to get out of those hairy moments.





It's full of stars...

Mutant Storm's visuals are impressive – in a retro kind of way. Every level is like a psychedelic explosion, and as you move around the arena, it tips and rotates in response, creating an eye-numbing display of colours and pyrotechnics.

Simplicity is the key factor here. There's almost nothing to the gameplay except moving and shooting. For any other game this may very well be a downfall, but for Mutant Storm, this suits things perfectly. Levels start off easy enough, but quickly become fast and frantic battles for survival, and getting all they way through to the 89th level will require some seriously ninja skills. If you want a game that doesn't tax the brain, but gives your trigger finger and reflexes a major workout, then you should definitely grab this. Oh, and it's only a fiver...

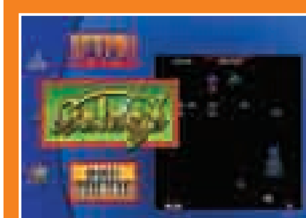
Rating:

›X-Mutant

As well as doing the rounds on PC and Mac, Mutant Storm has also found its way onto Microsoft's Xbox. However, you'll not find the game in any shops, as it's only available via the new Xbox Live Arcade service.

This service, currently only available in the US, is a new idea to bolster the already successful online aspect of the Xbox, and through it you can download full games to your console's hard disk for a small price. You can then play these games just like any other, and Mutant Storm is just one of the games available on the service. Other games already available include retro classics like Galaga, Pole Position, Dig Dug, Ms Pac-Man and Defender.

At the moment, there are no plans to bring the service over to the Europe. But with so many retro classics available, let's hope that it eventually finds its way to our shores.



eMag



Retro Gamer journeys back to the beginning of the epic Elder Scrolls saga, one of the most popular RPG series ever made

The Elder Scrolls series will be familiar to most of you, if not by experience, then at least by name. The franchise has now been going for 10 years, and the most recent release – Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind – won a whole slew of awards. The series has become synonymous with huge sprawling worlds, total player freedom and epic quests that can take years to fully explore. All ingredients that the hardcore RPG fanbase lust for, and ingredients that developer Bethesda Softworks has delivered every time.

Arena (1994)

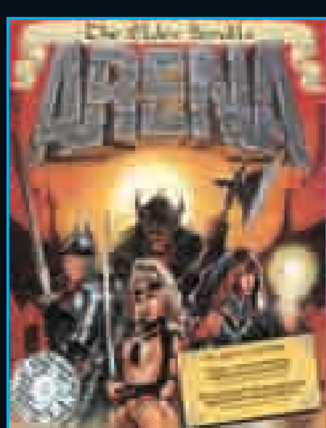
The whole thing kicked off in 1994 with the first Elder Scrolls release – Arena. However, this debut title would ultimatley turn out to be a radically different game from the original concept. The first plans of Arena were of a medieval style gladiator game, hence the name, and in it you'd control a group of tough as nails fighters who'd travel the world looking for trouble. You'd fight in a series of cities, becoming the champion in each tournament. However, this plan quickly changed after the team came up with the actual game world. This world was called Tamriel, and was actually a creation of the D&D playing Bethesda staff which was used in their own weekly pen and paper D&D campaigns.

With the game's already fleshed out world in place, it wasn't long before the team started to add more and more functions. They wanted to actually walk around their own cities and provinces, and to be able to actually enter dungeons. The result was a full-blown RPG, complete with heavy role playing elements. This was going to be much more than a simple gladiatorial combat game.

Taking inspiration from the current greats, such as Ultima Underworld and the impressive Legends of Valour, Arena was eventually turned into an enormous free roaming first-person RPG, and was one of the first games to truly bring the pen and paper D&D complexity to the small screen.

The story revolves around a rather unscrupulous man by the name of Jagar Tharn. Tharn is the battlemage to the Emperor of Tamriel, Uriel Septim. But, wanting absolute power, he betrays the emperor by using an ancient artefact called the Staff of Chaos. The Emperor is then imprisoned in another dimension. You and another of the Emperor's allies discover Tharn's plot, and are found out by him. Your associate is killed and you are locked up in the Imperial dungeons. Thanks to the ghost of your former friend, you escape to your home province and embark on a quest to stop the evil tyrant. So begins a mind-numbingly huge adventure.

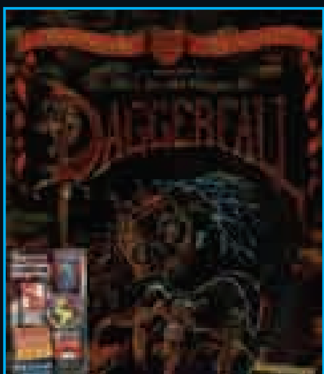
In Arena you had to wander the entire world of Tamriel and find all eight pieces of the Staff of Chaos. During your quest you'd explore all types of terrain, ranging from idyllic forests and meadows, to wastelands, dungeons and cities. The control system made the first-person viewpoint work very well, not relying on complex button presses or combinations. The gameplay was fast and fluid, and as the whole world was so richly detailed, you couldn't help but be sucked into the massive quest.











Daggerfall (1996)

Bethesda began to create the second chapter, Daggerfall, as soon as work on Arena was finished. For the sequel, changes would be made…

The team believed that having the entire world of Tamriel in the game didn't give them the feel they wanted. Although it was huge and free roaming, it all felt a little generic, and some critics even claimed that the world was too big, and daunted many would-be players. This lead to Bethesda's decision to ditch Tamriel as the game world, and instead the team decided to focus on the separate provinces. Daggerfall would be the first game to feature this, and although the province of Morrowind and the city of Mournhold were originally slated to be the main locations in the game, things were moved around and the sequel instead took place in the provinces of High Rock and Hammerfell, revolving around the city of Daggerfall. But, it wasn't just the locations that changed. Ditching the simplistic advancement system seen in Arena (you gained points by simply killing things), Daggerfall introduced the Elder Scrolls staple of character advancement that rewarded you based on the actions you performed. The game also broke new ground from a technical point of view. Whereas Arena used a similar engine to Doom, in which the world was in actuality a 2D creation made to look 3D, Daggerfall used the XnGine engine. This was gaming's first ever true 3D engine, and enabled Bethesda to produce a truly three dimensional world.

The story of Daggerfall once again involves the Emperor, who sends you to Daggerfall in order to free the soul of King Lysandus, who haunts the city. You also have to track down a letter from the Emperor, which should have been delivered to the daughter of the Blades, a secret sect of knights who work for the Emperor and do his dirty work. Eventually you end up in a quest to restore a giant golem to life, and have to deal with several factions, performing many quests and missions along the way.

Depending on the decisions you make, Daggerfall presents you with multiple routes through the game, and six diffarnt endings. So, you could feasibly play the massive adventure through six times, with each experience being totally different.

Battlespire (1997)

Daggerfall had the impact that Bethesda so dearly wanted. The public were now sucked into the Elder Scrolls world, and couldn't get enough. So, realising the high demand, Bethesda started work on three projects at the same time. Work on Battlespire, Redguard and Morrowind began, with the first title to arrive being Battlespire, the full title of which was An Elder Scrolls Legend: Battlespire.



Originally called Dungeon of Daggerfall, this instalment of the series was planned as an expansion pack for the second chapter. But, with Morrowind offering huge challenges due to its size, the later game was put on hold and the team concentrated on Battlespire and Redguard. More work was put into the two games and Battlespire, which was originally planned as a simple dungeon-based combat game, transformed into a full blown adventure, complete with speech, a deep story and RPG elements. It was also the only Elder Scrolls game to feature a multiplayer mode, with gamers being able to fight each other, deathmatch-style.

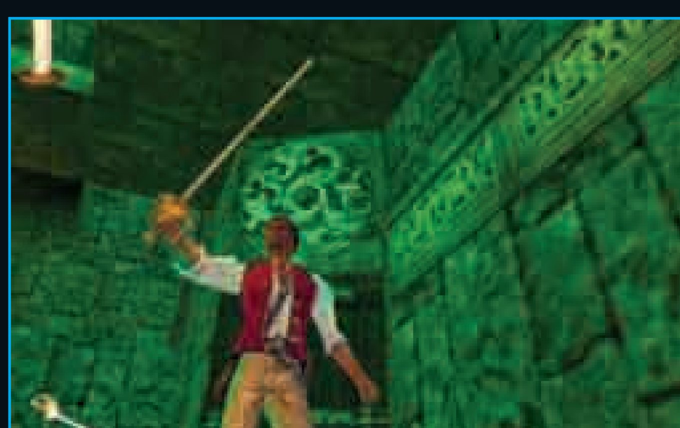
The bizarre story of Battlespire cast you as an agent sent into the chaotic realm of Oblivion in which the Battlespire (a sort of elite training base) is found. The inhabitants of the base have all been killed, and now the evil Daedra race populate the halls. Needless to say, your quest is to find out what has happened, and to save the Battlespire from destruction. Only when the world is saved can you return to Tamriel.

Redguard (1998)

Although it was developed at the same time as Battlespire, Redguard was a totally different kettle of fish, and replaced the deep RPG roots of its predecessors with a much more commercial approach.

The game was titled The Elder Scrolls Adventures: Redguard, and





was a straightforward action adventure in which you had to fight enemies, converse with allies and solve puzzles. It borrowed ideas from many of the greats of the time, including Tomb Raider, Ultima and even Prince of Persia. The game also functioned as a vehicle that enabled the team to fully push the XnGine engine to see what it was capable of. The game took place in and around the town of Stros M'kai, and pushed the engine to its limits. As well as the radical departure of the game style, this was also the first Elder Scrolls in which you didn't create your own character. Instead you controlled the Redguard hero, Cyrus.

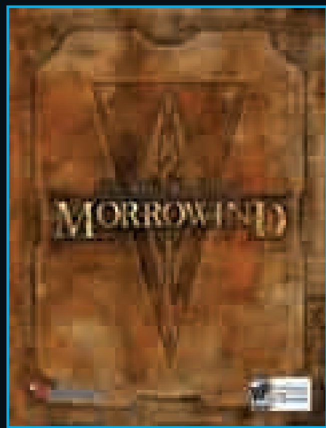
The story of Redguard sees Cyrus searching for his sister. But, as soon as he approaches the town of Stros M'kai, he's engulfed in a much larger conflict involving the Redguard rebellion. Cyrus ends up at odds with the Empire and is thrown into a trap-ridden dungeon (which is where the Prince of Persia references make themselves clear). Over the course of the game you have to venture through a wide range of locations, jumping, swinging and fighting your way to victory.

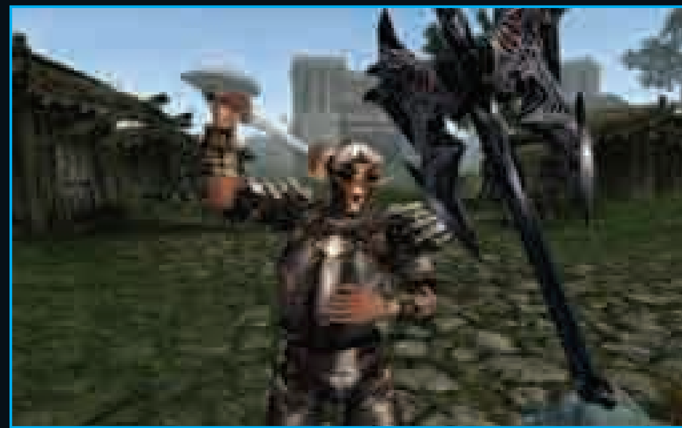
Morrowind (2002)

After the release of Redguard, it would be another four years until fans would see a new instalment of the Elder Scrolls series, but the wait would be more than worth it. Morrowind was the first official sequel since Daggerfall, having the Elder Scrolls III moniker, and was in development over the course of six long years.

Morrowind was originally titled Tribunal, and was set in Summerset Isle. A redesign changed this however, and the game was moved to the Dark Elves' homeland of Morrowind. The game would encompass the entire province of Morrowind, and would detail all five houses of the Dark Elves. Many other in-depth features were also planned, such as the destruction of cites and entire armies marching through the world, but due to technical limitations, this was not to be. The project was put on hold in 1997.

Eventually, in late 1998, after the completion of Redguard, the team came back to Morrowind with renewed vigour. Realising how much 3D graphics and technology





had advanced, they set out to return The Elder Scrolls to the forefront of modern gaming. Using the experience gained from Redguard, Morrowind was toned down to encompass the island of Vvardenfell, but the entire world was constructed by hand. This would produce a world far in advance of Arena and Daggerfall (where the worlds were created by random mathematical code), but would take a staggering 100 man-years to accomplish. To achieve this lofty goal, Bethesda tripled its staff and spent a whole year developing the TES Construction Kit, the building block program that would create the world of Morrowind.

The final article was an RPG so epic in proportion that it simply defied belief. Not only was the world huge, but it looked amazing, right down to the smallest detail, and the journey was completely free roaming, being littered with 100s of side quests. Your character had an unparalleled development system, and the whole thing was like having a second life. There were also two expansion packs for the game – Tribunal (which brought in some of the content originally planned, but later dropped), and Bloodmoon. Morrowind also introduced both first- and third-person views, as well as a dynamic weather system.

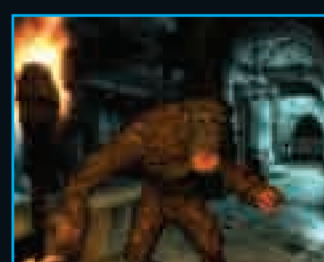
The story of Morrowind is as deep and as complex as the game itself. Starting off as an unknown, you arrive on the island of Vvardenfell, sent on a mission by the Emperor to fulfil an ancient prophecy. The prophecy tells of a once powerful hero of the Dunmer (Dark Elves), known as Nerevar. It is believed that you are the reincarnation of this hero, and you must uncover the full truth behind the prophecy, and must save Morrowind from the immortal Dagoth Ur. Along the way you'll uncover all sorts of plot twists, and will have to brave many dangers. The quest is truly huge, and many players have put in over 100 hours of play time, and have still to see everything the game has to offer.

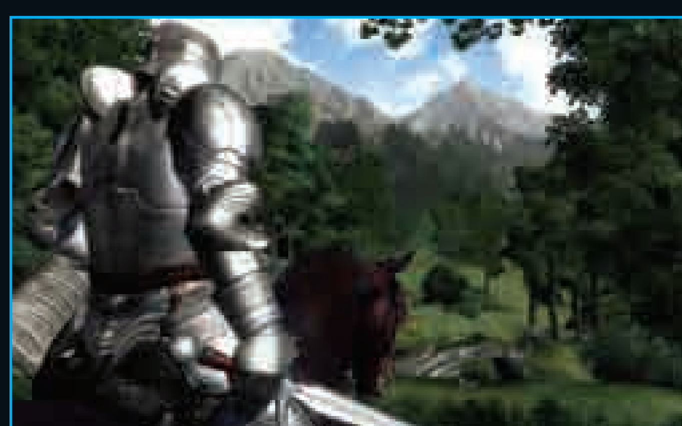
Oblivion (2005)

This brings us to the present day, and the upcoming title in the Elder Scrolls series – Oblivion. Work started on the title in 2002, and Bethesda is keen to once again deliver the most in-depth and impressive RPG experience ever. Like Morrowind, and all the other Elder Scrolls before it, Oblivion will again give the player total freedom to explore the world and quests at their own pace. This time, the action will take place in Tamriel's capital province Cyrodiil, the seat of the Emperor. Your mission will be to find the heir to the now empty throne, as the previous Emperor was killed by an assassin. With the Emperor gone, the gates of Oblivion (which is the Elder Scrolls' version of Hell) open and all manner of demonic creatures and beasts now roam the lands, attacking towns and villages. You're the last hope for the people.

Oblivion is already looking like a superb sequel. With amazing levels of detail and complexity, Bethesda is crafting an RPG world which will no doubt swallow you whole and never spit you out. As well as the eye-melting visuals, Oblivion will feature a new radical AI system called Radiant AI. This will bestow all NPCs (Non-Playable Characters) with their own minds and thoughts, and people will go about their own business doing what they want. So, rather than simply milling around a set area, not doing anything in particular, people will go to eat, attend church, shop, talk and even fight. Oblivion will also feature a fully spoken script, rather then the text-heavy Morrowind approach.

And there you have it – 10 years of The Elder Scrolls. And with the quality that Bethesda has delivered so far, and the promise of Oblivion, let's hope that there's another 10 years to come.





eMag

Welcome back! This month, Jonti Davies, our man in Japan, takes a look at SNK's legendary home console formats, reviews the rock hard Neo-Geo shoot-em-up that is Viewpoint, and gives you the inside scoop on Starfox 2. *Itadakimasu!*

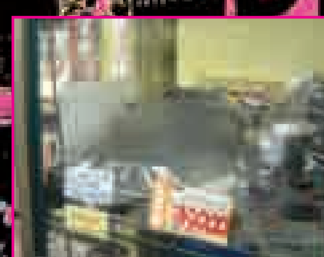
›Format focus: Neo-Geo/Neo-Geo CD

We get to grips with the hardcore fraternity's format of choice to find out why SNK is going nowhere quick

The Neo-Geo MVS arcade format is still in circulation. In Japan, particularly, many original MVS machines remain in game centers. Likewise, the home console versions of SNK's celebrated format are graced with new releases even today. With a catalogue of great 2D games and several versions of the console hardware available, it's time to journey to the heart of the Neo-Geo labyrinth.

The first game console SNK released was the AES. The Neo-Geo AES is a cartridge system which basically plays identical versions of the MVS carts released to arcade operators. The major plus points from owning an AES are zero loading times, superb joysticks (possibly the best proper sticks outside of the arcades) and a slab of console hardware that looks as powerful today as it did back in the early 90s. The downside is expense. You can pick up the console for about £100 here, but while games start at around £10, the really important titles cannot be obtained for less than £100.

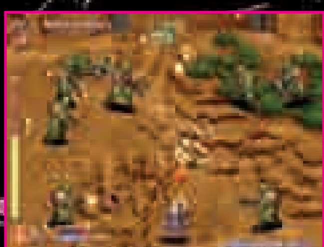


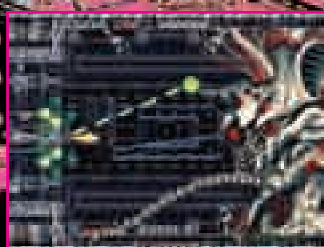


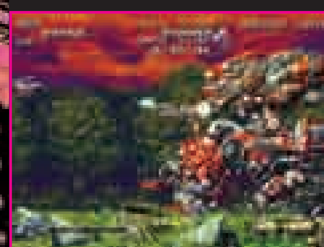
Big in Japan... The Neo-Geo CD (left), and the dual-speed Neo-Geo CDZ

The Neo-Geo CD systems – and, crucially, its games – are far more reasonably priced. The original front-loading NGCD goes for around Y6,000 (£30) while its immediate successor is a snip at just Y3,000 (£15). The problem with these systems is a lack of drive speed. Loading times for some CD games are longer than a









Shoot-em-up stars on the Neo-Geo. Clockwise from top: Metal Slug 2, Blazing Star, Pulstar and Shock Troopers

minute between stages. If you're not the tolerant type then don't bother.

By far the best Neo-Geo CD option is the CDZ. This upgraded version of the NGCD hardware is not only sleeker than the two previous attempts, but it's also considerably quicker. Loading times are generally half as long on the CDZ as they are on the single-speed drives of the original Neo-Geo CD hardware. The premium to pay for these benefits isn't too steep: the going rate for a CDZ is Y14,000 (about £70).

Whether you choose an AES, NGCD or CDZ, the SNK controllers are all fantastic. The heavyweight joysticks of the AES perfectly replicate the feel of playing MVS titles in the arcade. The original CD controller is a joypad that uses a microswitched thumbpad similar to that used later on the Neo-Geo Pocket. And there's also a CD/CDZ-compatible arcade stick built by SNK which, although smaller and lighter than the AES stick, is nevertheless excellent for the types of game available on SNK formats – namely, beat-em-ups and shoot-em-ups.

Neoclassical games

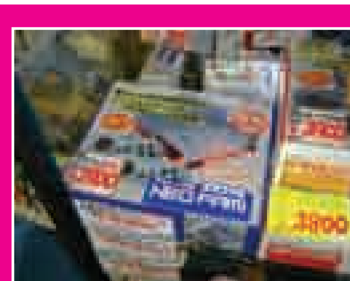
Nazca Corp's Metal Slug games are prime examples of 2D Neo-Geo action. They display some excellent hand-drawn graphics, and underneath their stylish and impressive visual craft lies a simple concept, brilliantly executed: it's just shoot or be shot at. Saurus-developed Shock Troopers and its sequel 2nd Squad are similarly manic platform shooters, and are both highly recommended. In a more traditional shoot-em-up guise, Pulstar and Blazing Star lead the way with their formidable gameplay and graphics. Both of these titles are rare, however, and even in Japan they're almost impossible to find.

Of course, beat-em-ups are the dominant species. The King Of Fighters series is a fans' favourite, though which version is best will never be resolved. In the dark and legendary world of Samurai Shodown, too, there's a wealth of choice.

Outside of those prevailing genres, there are some hidden gems. The Super Sidekicks series gives Konami's Super Famicom soccer games a good run for their money (check out Sidekicks 3 for the best action); Neo Turf Masters is a classically designed arcade golf sim; and Windjammers is an early title which proved that volleyball, if given an explosive edge, could be as addictive as Tetris. Speaking of which, an arcade-perfect version of Puzzle Bobble is well worth having around.

The Neo-Geo consoles are a great collection of 2D videogame champions. Just avoid the snail-slow original CD hardware and you'll find that an unusually high proportion of games on the Neo-Geo format are worthy of your time. None more so, in fact, than Viewpoint...››››

›100% unofficial!

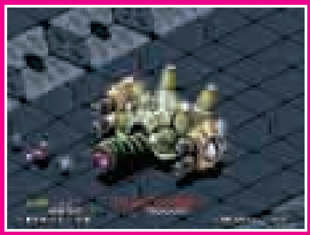


The original Famicom's enduring popularity has created a niche market for Gametech, a Japanese company whose products are manufactured in China. The bizarrely named NeoFami is Gametech's latest creation. For all intents and purposes, it's a Famicom clone in a horrible blocky shell. The system is being bundled with two equally ugly controllers and sold across Japan at a low, low price of Y3,900 (£20). That compares favourably with the Y7,000 or more that a used but genuine Famicom costs today.

Strangely, the NeoFami has been on the shelves of Japanese game stores for some time now. Even in Kyoto, right on Nintendo's doorstep, there are plenty of shops stocking the iffy hardware. We're surprised that the Big N hasn't yet bullied Little Gametech out of town. Still, Gametech is used to playing audacious games such as this – the last Gametech product we tested was the Terebi De Advance, which preceded Nintendo's own GB Player hardware and essentially did the same job (bringing GBA games to the TV). We'll investigate dodgy goods, which are usually associated with parts of Asia other than Japan, in a future issue.

›Daihitto! Award

This month's 'big hit' honours go to the best isometric shoot-em-up you'll ever play: Viewpoint by Sammy


The Neo-Geo formats are principally home grounds for horizontal and vertical 2D games, but there are some notable exceptions to the rule. Viewpoint, of 1992 vintage, is the best of the non-2D lot.

The game is played from an isometric perspective with solidly constructed enemies and environments made from vector-based polygons, which give the impression of a fully 3D production. In a Zaxxon kind of way, there's a diagonal grid to fly around. In reality, though, Viewpoint plays not too dissimilarly to a standard 2D shoot-em-up. The forward momentum that carries your ship through each stage can be slowed down by pulling back on the joystick and, when it's necessary, you can speed up by pushing forwards.

Because of the isometric nature of the game, enemy wave patterns are very obvious. Often they are symmetrical, which makes it possible to clear two simultaneous waves from one central position. Learning where to pitch your craft is vital and, when done well, immensely satisfying. It's a battle of wits, not just bullets. The tactical bent extends to checkpoints and blocked passages, where a lever/switch/handle must be shot repeatedly in order to open the way for progress – accurate shooting opens the door to later areas of the given stage.

Your craft is armed with a typical charge shot (a la R-Type) and a trio of bombs. Bomb shots, though limited in number, are deadly effective. The best one, a blazing firewall, spans the width of Viewpoint's play area and spreads across the whole field of play, wiping out everything on the screen.

It's clear from the off that Viewpoint is a high quality production. The visuals are sharp and bold, and the game's unusual enemies are animated impressively. The soundtrack to this title is also a cause for Neo celebration – it's a strangely epic blend of downtempo funk, upbeat techno, James Brown samples and, um, Bontempi.

Another aspect that sets Viewpoint apart from most of its kin is its difficulty level: this is a very tough game, by anyone's standards. Unlike last month's shoot-em-up of choice (Macross: Scrambled Valkyrie), Viewpoint runs on a one-hit-dead policy which exacts punishment for even the tiniest show of poor play. The result is a compelling blast with all the right ingredients. On either AES or CD format, this is one of the finest Neo-Geo shoot 'em ups to own.

›Inside Nintendo

An ex-Nintendo employee tells us about a few things. This month: the unreleased Starfox 2 for the Super Famicom



Our contact worked at Nintendo's Kyoto headquarters in the Super Famicom glory days. We asked him about Starfox 2, which he worked on until its (near) completion. So, how good would it have been?

"It was kind of like the Starfox that's coming out for the GameCube, Starfox Assault. You had a lot of free-roaming exploration and had to work out what to do, and the levels were really short. There wasn't just the Arwing: there was a walker and a little hovering thing, and you could switch between them. That was a main point, because the maps were a lot smaller than in Starfox and they were square; they required you to do stuff in an arena.

"There were hundreds of those little stages, and they were selected randomly as you played through a strategy map. You had the enemy forces coming down, and had to play battles with them on planets."

So, why didn't the game get released? "It worked quite well," our friend continues, "but for Nintendo it wasn't enough like the original Starfox. The designers really went off on a tangent. The new FX Chip it used allowed for a lot more textures and things."

For the curious among you, the final beta version of Starfox 2 has since been leaked onto the Web and its fully playable using the latest version of the ZSNES emulator (www.zsnes.com).



eMag

MSX APPEAL

Since its launch in 2001, Microsoft's Xbox has been a huge success in the UK and USA, but is still struggling to survive in Japan. 20 years ago the exact opposite was true as Microsoft had a hand in creating the range of MSX home computers, which were very popular in Japan, but struggled in the UK and were completely unavailable in the US. Ashley Day looks back at the creation of the first gaming standard

The MSX standard was invented by Kazuhiko Nishi of Japan's ASCII Corporation as an attempt to realise a single format across all home computers. Just as VHS had become a single format for home video, Nishi proposed that multiple manufacturers would be able to develop and sell their own MSX machines as long as they remained compatible with all existing software and peripherals. ASCII designed the hardware, which was originally made from off-the-shelf components such as the Zilog Z80A processor running at 3.58MHz, General Instruments' AY-3-8910 sound chip and the Texas Instruments V9918 graphics chip, plus between 8Kb and 64Kb of memory. As such the internal architecture was very similar, if not identical to its contemporaries – the Colecovision and the Spectrum. Microsoft programmed the MSX BASIC language, and it is from this that the machine allegedly gets its name.

When the MSX was released in Europe in 1984, Microsoft claimed that MSX stood for MicroSoft eXtended basic and that the abbreviation signified the cross-compatibility of the various machines on the market. When Microsoft dropped support for the machine in 1988 however, they quickly denied any association between themselves and the MSX name. The naming of the machine was contradicted further in a Japanese business magazine in 1997, wherein Nishi claimed that he wanted to call the machine NSX (meaning Nishi Sony X, with the X being any other manufacturer that supported the machine), but the name was already being used by Honda. Nishi, later still, claimed that MSX stood for Machines with Software eXchangeability. Debate over the meaning of the name continues to this day, though it is mostly irrelevant.

Open range

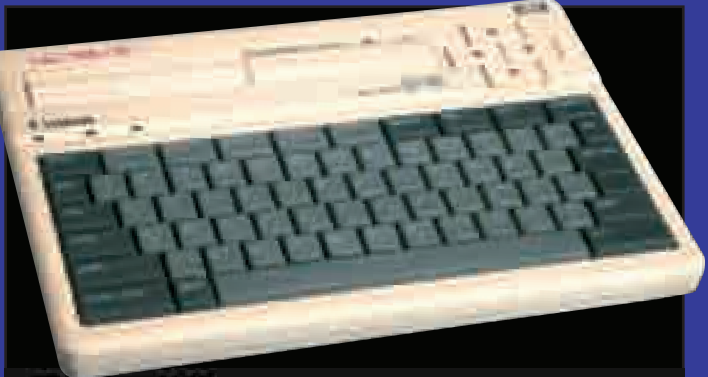
What set the MSX apart from other microcomputers of the time was that while the machines were fully compatible with the MSX standard, each one was different enough to suit users' needs. Over 70 different manufacturers developed their own MSX machines with individual quirks and features, most of these were Japanese but there were also MSXs made in other parts of Asia, Europe and South America. The wide variety of machines meant an almost unlimited choice was available to the MSX buyer but better still, anyone who collects MSX hardware in the present could spend the rest of their future trying to obtain a complete set.

The MSX's Western and Eastern heritage meant that it soon became home to a uniquely wide variety of games. The best British games, such as Head Over Heels and Chuckie Egg were available on tape whilst top quality Japanese arcade hits like Bubble Bobble and Gradius were generally released on cartridge. The machine represented the best of both worlds for UK gamers – as even though Japanese games had been converted to the C64 and Spectrum, the MSX versions had no loading times, looked closer to the arcade originals and featured many of the levels that were missing from other versions.

Many models of the MSX had two cartridge slots built into them. These were originally intended to house permanent expansions (such as the Panasonic FMPAC, which was a plug in sound synthesiser cartridge), but as the MSX matured, developers found other uses for the two cartridge slots. The most innovative of these was Konami's method of using two games at once: if a user inserted two Konami game cartridges into the MSX at once then something special would sometimes happen. Plug in both Gradius and Twinbee for example and you could play Gradius with the Twinbee ship and collect bells as power-ups instead of the regular pods. Similarly, If a player lost all their health in Yie Ar Kung-Fu 2 then they would usually just fall over and die, but if they had the first game plugged in a character would appear at the last second and revive the player with a refreshing cup of tea.

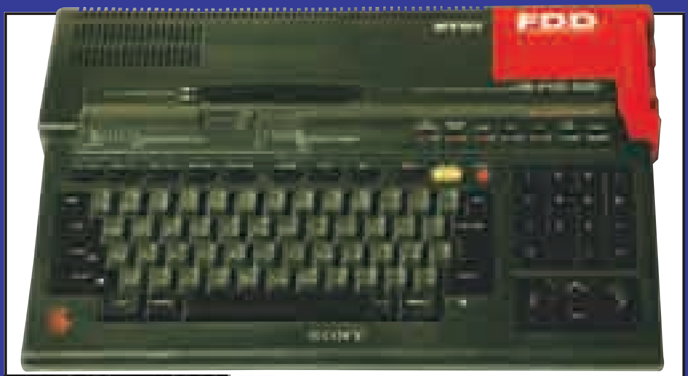
Times two

Two years after the MSX was launched, ASCII developed the MSX2 standard. Like the MSX before it, all versions of the



MSX

The Cannon V-8. Released in Japan in 1983, this is a typical example of an early MSX model



MSX 2

The Sony HB-F1XD. An MSX2 model with a built-in 3.5in, 720Kb floppy disk drive



MSX 2+

The Sanjo Wavy 35J. A later MSX2+ machine with a host of additional features

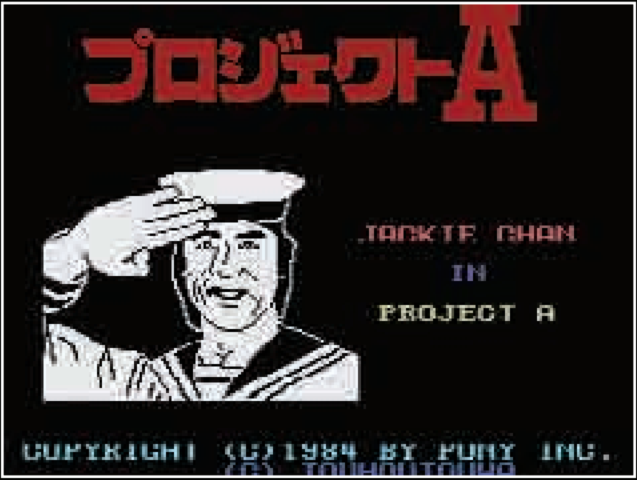


MSX turbo R

The Panasonic FS-A1ST. One of the very few Turbo R models that were sold exclusively in Japan

›Chan-tastic!

These title screens to Pony Canyon's Project A and Project A2 show the massive difference in power between the MSX and MSX2. Project A was released on tape for the MSX and features largely monochrome graphics with no shading whatsoever. Project A2 was released on cartridge for the MSX2 and features a dynamic logo with multiple colours and basic shading. The title screen also shows off just how well the MSX2 could handle digitised images and is easily comparable to early Amiga and Atari ST examples.











Of the few dedicated MSX2+ games available, Konami's F-1 Spirit: 3D Special is easily the best

machine were compatible with each-other and also had to be backwards compatible with the original MSX. All MSX2s had between 64Kb and 256Kb of RAM, had MSX BASIC 2.0 or 2.1 built-in, and included a battery-backed clock. Most MSX2s also had a built-in 3.5in floppy disk drive. For gamers this was a big improvement over the first as the disk format meant bigger and longer games could be played, whilst the increased MSX palette of 512 colours meant that graphics were a lot more detailed.

The MSX2 was poorly supported in the west, so most of the games came from the Japanese developers, but this does not mean there were a lack of quality titles to play.
This was the period when the best MSX games were released as the likes of Konami, Compile and Taito continued to churn out fantastic games such as Metal Gear, Vampire Killer, Aleste and Rastan Saga. These titles really showed off what the MSX2 was capable of and are among some of the best games of the 1980s.

By 1988 most MSX users were expecting the MSX3 to be announced, but it was never to happen. Instead Microsoft dropped all support for the machine and ASCII took full control. The decision was made to follow the MSX2 with the MSX2+, which was only available in Japan and was only ever made by Sony, Panasonic and Sanyo. The main improvements over the MSX2 were the inclusion of a built in 9 channel FM synthesiser known as MSX Music, the ability to display still images in roughly 19,000 colours and the addition of three new screen modes. One of these screen modes fixed the problem of jerky scrolling in MSX games and produced an impressively smooth-scrolling effect in compatible titles. All machines also featured two sliding dials, one changed the speed of the hardware whilst the other (known as Rensha Turbo) was an autofire feature with variable frequencies. A blessing to importers was that the MSX2+ was fully RGB compatible, so



The future of MSX? A chip-based MSX1 with the capability to play both original cartridges and legally downloaded software

required no modification to run on UK television sets. There were very few dedicated MSX2+ games released that were worth playing, as most developers instead chose to add special features to their MSX2 games if they were played on a 2+. Space Manbow, for example, featured super-smooth scrolling and suffered from none of the jerkiness that had plagued Gradius and Salamander.

Turbo power

As the gaming world moved into the 90s, computers were becoming less fashionable and many of the previous supporters of the MSX had moved on to Sega and Nintendo's games consoles, whilst the likes of Sony and Philips were keen to develop their own consoles. Several MSX manufacturers also decided to stop supporting the format because the vast number of variations on offer meant that they were only earning money for a small percentage of the total MSX sales. Despite this, Panasonic solely supported the final version of the MSX. The MSX Turbo R was little more than a 28 MHz, 16-bit update of the MSX2+ and although it was desirable to computing enthusiasts, there were very few Turbo R specific games made, and none of which are worth mentioning.

The Turbo R sold favourably in Japan but could never realistically compete with the expanding PC market or with the Mega Drive and Super Famicom. Many computer programs were released but the lack of games meant that people soon lost interest in the MSX.

The machine has lived on through its enthusiasts and many homebrew games are available via the Internet. New games can be downloaded for free for play on emulators and many sites allow their games to be downloaded in WAV format and audibly copied onto a cassette tape so that they can be played on a real MSX.

Meanwhile, ASCII and the MSX Association are busy preparing for the MSX revival. The MSX Association and Bazix (their European representative) are planning on redistributing old MSX games for the first time in English via **www.woomb.net**, whilst ASCII has developed an MSX that will fit on one single chip. Aside from the late 80s there has never been a better time to be an MSX fan.

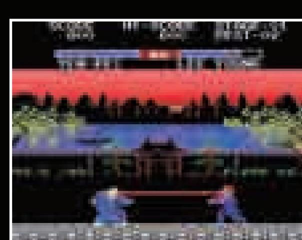
›Konami Antiques

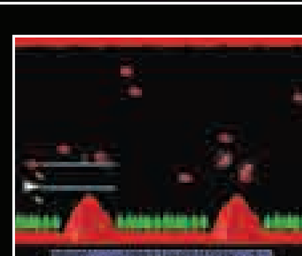
Collecting and playing original MSX games can be an expensive and time-consuming hobby; cartridges fetch very high prices at auction and if you are lucky enough to find a disk game, you would be even luckier to find one that is still in working condition. For the cash-strapped retro gamer, Konami Antiques MSX Collection is a quick and easy way to play many of the MSX's early classics without having to spend weeks trading with strangers in other countries. Released in three volumes for the Japanese PlayStation, and one 'Ultra Pack' for the Japanese Saturn, the Antiques MSX Collection features 30 of Konami's MSX cartridge games.

The collection undoubtedly has a few titles that you would never want to play, like the sports games that have not aged very well, but there are also a handful of classics on the disc that would sit nicely in anyone's collection whether they are into the MSX or not. Konami's classic shooters, Twinbee, Parodius, Salamander and the first three Gradius games are all included, as are Antarctic Adventure and its wonderful sequel Penguin Adventure. These are all excellent games and their age does nothing to betray their flawless playability, even if Gradius is still inhumanly difficult.

As an MSX retrospective the collection does suffer because of the lack of titles from any other developer and as they are all MSX1 titles, the likes of Metal Gear and Vampire Killer are nowhere to be seen. Konami, however, was probably the MSX's most prolific developer so the wealth of choice on offer in the collection really makes up for these flaws and the disc is well worth buying for both Konami and MSX fans.







›Eight great games

Although these are not necessarily the best games for the MSX, they are the most desirable. Many are included because of their exclusivity to the MSX or the way they take advantage of the machine's unique capabilities. Where applicable, we've included a guide to what you'd expect to pay from the privilege of owning them

Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake

MSX2, cartridge, 1990

While NES gamers had to put up with Snake's Revenge, featuring a Solid Snake in an incredibly un-stealthy orange jump suit, MSX2 owners were treated to the real deal. Officially produced by Hideo Kojima, Metal Gear 2 featured many improvements over the original, including guards that can move their heads to look in different directions whilst they patrol and can hear Snake knock on walls. The game even features a danger meter based on whether the guards are alerted to your presence or not. This is as close as anyone can get to playing Metal Gear Solid in 2D (and yes that does include Metal Gear Solid on the GameBoy Color). What's more – the game looks and sounds fantastic for an 8-bit title, all thanks to the power of the MSX2. Since Metal Gear 2 was only released on the MSX in Japan it is a reasonably rare game, with prices ranging from £100-170 depending on the condition.



SD Snatcher

MSX2, disk, 1990

The SD stands for Super Deformed, a Japanese art style used to make adults look like children. Think tiny bodies and big heads and you're on the right track. SD Snatcher is a cute RPG remake of Hideo Kojima's cyber-punk adventure Snatcher. While the story is identical, the gameplay and graphics are completely different. The battle system took the lightgun sections of the original and transferred them to the joypad. Using the cursor, from a first-person view, you could aim at different parts of the enemy, shoot their hands to disarm them or go for head shots for instant kills. The game was released on three disks and came with Konami's SCC cartridge to enhance the in-game music. Finding a copy of the game with all of these elements intact is now extremely difficult, especially as many SD Snatcher owners may have already sold their much sought after SCC cartridge separately. Expect to pay over £100.



Space Manbow

MSX2/2+, cartridge, 1990

This is the only shooter that Konami developed for the MSX2 and has never been released on any other format, so the only way you're going to play this is with an original cartridge and a real MSX2. For an MSX game Space Manbow looks absolutely beautiful. Every sprite is packed with colour and detail, and when the game is played on an MSX2+ the screen scrolls with the sort of smoothness you would expect from the Super Famicom. The original version of Space Manbow came with a manga that introduced the 'story' of the game. Finding a copy of Manbow with the manga intact will set you back a good £120. If you just want to play the game though you should be able to find an unboxed copy for around the £40 mark. Incidentally, if you haven't already bought Gradius V then you should do, not least because Space Manbow inspired many of its scenarios and enemies.



Jet Set Willy

MSX1, cartridge and BeeCard, 1985

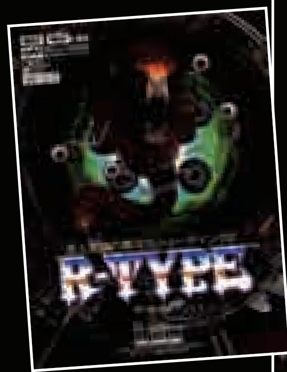
Any fool can brave the cold on a Sunday morning and pick up a copy of Jet Set Willy for about 10 pence, but if you want to be truly elite about retro collecting then tracking down a British classic on an obscure Japanese format might just be for you. Hudson (of Bomberman fame) introduced Matthew Smith's platform game to the Japanese public by way of both cartridge and BeeCard – a slim ROM-card that needed a special adapter to fit into the MSX. By 1985 the Japanese were already playing Super Mario Bros so they probably laughed at Jet Set Willy and its complete lack of background images or scrolling levels, so you should be able to relieve some Japanese gamers of their 'unwanted gift' for about £30 on Yahoo-Japan (**http://auctions.yahoo.co.jp**).



R-Type

MSX1/2, cartridge, 1988

If you ever wanted to play R-Type on an 8-bit system there were a wealth of different versions available, yet few could match the arcade version for control and visuals. The PC Engine version was very good but famously came on two separate and individually released hu-cards. The MSX version fit onto one 3Mbit ROM cartridge and although it resembled a Spectrum game on the MSX, if played on an MSX2 it looked absolutely superb. This is hardly an essential purchase these days as the PlayStation port (part of the R-Types collection) is near flawless and fairly easy to find, but the MSX version is still an interesting item. At roughly £60 a pop though, R-Type on the MSX is for Irem completists only.



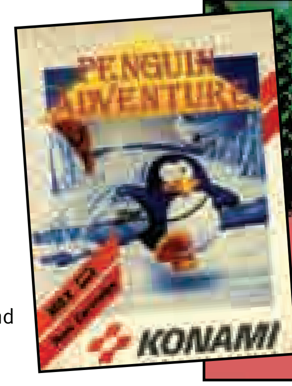


Penguin Adventure

MSX1, cartridge, 1986

Anyone who's ever played the insane shoot-em-up Parodius may have wondered just where Konami got its inexplicable obsession with penguins. The penguin is called Pentarou and originally appeared in Antarctic Adventure. Penguin Adventure is the sequel to that game and is arguably the most charming and playable game to be released on the MSX. The player must guide Pentarou across the entire continent of Antarctica in order to find a golden apple that will cure his rather ill girlfriend, Penko Hime (Princess Penguin). Penguin Adventure can actually be found very easily and shouldn't cost more than £20. Every MSX collector should get this game as it is packed full of everything that makes gaming a worthwhile hobby: challenge and fun. Konami fans may also be interested in this, as it was the first game that Hideo Kojima worked on as Assistant Director.



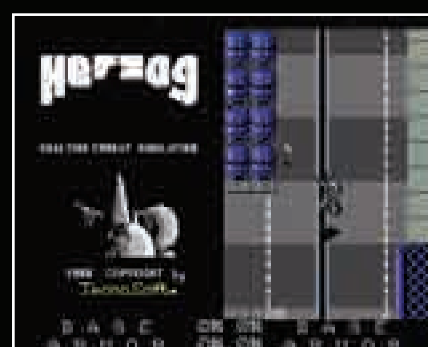


Herzog

MSX2, disk, 1988

This is a prequel to the Mega Drive sleeper hit Herzog Zwei. As the game features a fighter plane that transforms into a giant robot and was made by Tecno Soft you would be forgiven for thinking that Herzog is a scrolling shoot-em-up. Well it is, and it isn't. Herzog is actually a real-time strategy that pre-empted Dune II by a good five years. The idea is to destroy the enemy base before the enemy destroyed you, with units of enemies being deployed and commanded in the typical RTS way. The unique twist of Herzog is that as well as commanding your troops you actually take part in the battles by controlling the aforementioned fighter plane. The plane is unable to damage any of the bases but can be used to break the enemy's defence or stop units from getting too close to the player's base. Like Penguin Adventure this is another MSX title that should be in everyone's collection, despite the £70+ price tag.





Dungeons & Dragons

MSX Turbo R, CD-ROM, 2004

The Turbo R never had any games worth playing during its lifetime, so it has been left to the homebrew scene to create something that resembles fun. Brazil's Slotman released Dungeons & Dragons just as this article was being written and although few people have yet to play the game it does look to be worth picking up. The game is actually based on the 1980s cartoon of the same name and features high quality digitised images from the show to form the game's cutscenes and opening movie. Taking the form of an RPG (of course), the player takes command of one of the main characters and must converse with allies and battle monsters. It looks to be a fairly typical RPG, but is very well presented and will be welcomed by any game-starved Turbo R owner. If you are one of the unlikely few who are planning on attending a Brazilian computer fair this year then be sure to pick up Dungeons & Dragons. If not then eBay is a more realistic option.





›MSX curios

With well over 100 variations of the hardware made available in the last 22 years, the MSX is an ideal computer for retro enthusiasts to collect. Here are just five that are worth keeping an eye out for...

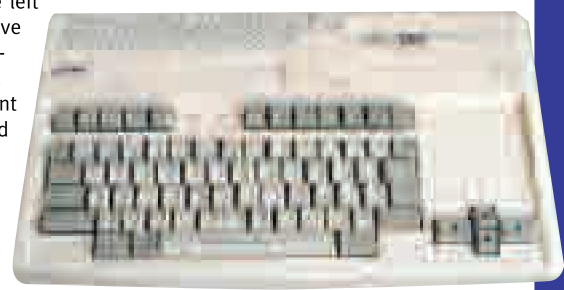
Zemmix Super Victory CPC-61

This is an MSX2 games console that was developed by Daewoo-Korea. It had one cartridge slot, just one joystick connector and a connection for a separate keyboard that turns the Zemmix into a fully programmable MSX. Although the Zemmix (meaning "It's fun" in Korean) is an officially licensed MSX compatible computer, it does play many hacked games on pirated cartridges.



Sakhr AX-330

The AX-330 is a very special machine. It was the very first home computer to be made available to Saudi Arabia in 1985 and is also a unique MSX. Originally developed by Yamaha and modified by Al Alamiah (Saudi Arabia's biggest consumer electronics firm), this MSX1 includes 64Kb of RAM and actually has a Sega Mega Drive built onto the main board! The cartridge slot on the right plays MSX games and the slot on the left plays Mega Drive games. The AX-330 also has a calendar, a paint programme and an English/Arabic text editor built into the system.



Sony HitBit-11

This is an MSX1 with 64Kb of RAM. It is internally identical to Sony's very first MSX except for an in-built Japanese-English word processor. It is highly desirable because of its attractive casing that is designed to resemble an American high-school blazer.



Panasonic FS-A1WX

Easily the gamers' choice when it comes to the MSX. It has 256Kb of RAM, includes a 3.5in floppy disk drive and an FM-PAC, and is MSX2+ compatible. If there's any commercial game you need to play this will run it. The FS-A1WX is relatively easy to find and should be the first stop for those looking to start an MSX collection. These usually go for about £30 in Japan. They'll cost a little more than that in the UK – around £50.



One Chip MSX

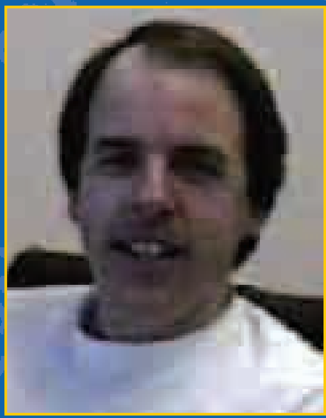
The MSX revival is in full swing now that ASCII has announced the development of what many are calling the MSX3. In reality it is just an MSX1 on a single chip but it does have some very special features. The prototype One Chip MSX contains 32Mb of SD RAM, 1Mb of SRAM, Flash ROM, an SD card slot, two cartridge slots, two MSX joystick ports, two USB ports, a PS/2 port, VGA and SVHS video outputs and a stereo audio-connector. The inclusion of two cartridge slots means that when the final product arrives in March it will be fully compatible with all original games, while the SD card slots allow users to store and play those legally downloaded games that are too hard to find on cartridge or disk. ASCII has also confirmed that the One Chip MSX will be expandable to an MSX2 at a later date.



eMag

Desert Island Disks

Welcome back to our lonely isle. This month Paul Drury whiles away the day with Eric Ginner, high scoring hero and Atari Lynx/Jaguar programmer



It's probably the most enduring image from the golden age of arcades. It's November 9th, 1982 and a group of the finest videogame players in the world gather together, accompanied by the cabinets that have played host to their extraordinary feats of skill and endurance. A row of cheerleaders adds some pizzazz and the whole iconic spectacle is captured for inclusion in America's prestigious *LIFE* magazine. One face in the crowd, smiling sheepishly at the back behind a Ms. Pac-Man machine, recalls the day the little town of Ottumwa, Iowa, became the unlikely capital of the gaming world.

"The whole event was organised by Walter Day and Twin Galaxies, which at that point I think was mostly just him," recalls Walter Ginner. "He invited most if not all of the players, mainly a record holder in each of the games in the magazine picture. Most of the major players were there and I don't remember anyone specific being left out, though I'm sure there were many more worthy of being there. The picture was taken really early in the morning and it was freezing cold, especially for a native Californian like myself. I think it was intended to be like a whole town event with as much hoopla as possible, which I guess explains the cheerleaders. It was quite the event, considering that Twin Galaxies was one small arcade in a small town. Yeah, it is sort of a fun claim to fame, especially with people who didn't know the game scene. A magazine picture has a lot more impact than telling someone you scored a million points on some game they've never heard of."

Gaming heritage

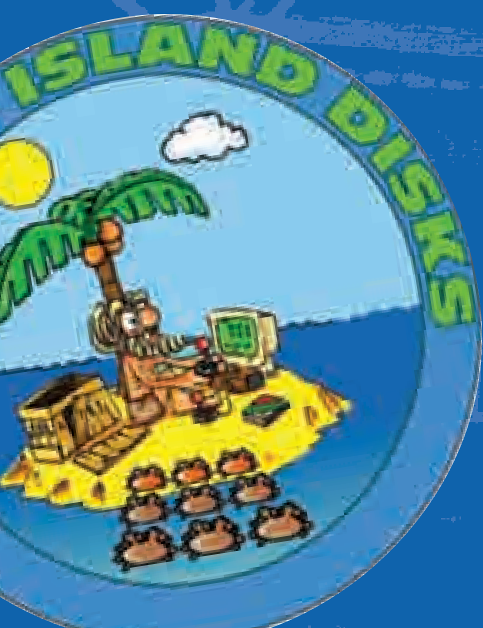
Games have always been a big part of Eric's life. Born in 1962 in Mountain View, California, the state which has been his home ever since, it began with Pong in the front room, before moving on to pinball in the Time Zone arcade nearby, a place he'd spend so much time that he became friends with the employees and indulged in much free after hours play. He did dabble with a little programming on an Atari 800, but nothing came close to a complete game.

"Games were certainly my number one hobby, but I never saw any career in it. Sure, I wanted to make a living playing games but it was nothing more than a joke at the time, sort of like saying I wanted to win the lottery... it would be great but not very realistic. I wasn't inspired to get into making games, I just wanted to play them at that time."

And play them he did. Golfland, which boasted over a hundred arcade cabinets and, yes, a miniature golf course for when the cacophony of bleeps and bloops became overwhelming, was like a second home to Eric.

"The first arcade game that hooked me was Asteroids. I liked the chaotic feel of trying to survive in the middle of everything and I remember it being so cool to get to put my initials in for the high score list.

"It got to the point where I could play as long as I wanted. Lots of people could do that eventually and it became a race every day to see who could stop at 99,990 to get their initials on





The famous *LIFE* magazine 'Video Game V.I.P.s' photograph. That's Eric on the back row, in the middle, betwixt two bearded fellows

the high score list. I don't think I played a single game more than a couple hours until one time at a bowling alley. A friend and I alternated playing to see how long we could go and started building up lots of extra ships. When there were so many extra ships saved that they were almost going off the screen, my friend played while I ran home to get a camera and came back and took pictures. I still have them around here somewhere I think..."

As Eric digs out the snap, I ask about strategies. Was he a 'lurker'? "Nah, my playing method was just the standard blast everything as quickly as possible. I never used the lurking method until I found out about it from other players. After that I would just use it when messing around. It was easy enough to get 99,990 points just playing normally and at that point the game was pretty much done for me since I wasn't into doing the marathon games. Somehow in this area the two spaceships became referred to as Beaver (the little ship) and Wally (the big ship). I don't remember how that started though..."

Leaderboard

As well as sharing strategies and inventing a bizarre name for that mean little spaceship that frequently ended the games of us mere mortals (I've got my own theory as to its origin...), the high score culture was beginning to take shape amongst expert players. Boards went up in arcades listing the current records, but these would be restricted to that particular venue. Eric and friends would occasionally travel further field to compare scores in other arcades, and this local rivalry soon grew to interstate proportions, as seen in the California versus North Carolina tournament, held in August 1982. Eric represented his home state admirably, clocking a cool 111,000,000 on Robotron after an exhausting 30 hours play. He could have continued, but as that set a new world record at the time, he stopped and explains that there was a kind of etiquette amongst champion players, which meant they usually ended their games voluntarily after beating the current top score. This meant records often changed hands, keeping the scene vibrant as well as allowing players to resume normal sleep patterns.

"I'm definitely most associated with Centipede because of winning the national contest in 1981. The contest took place in Chicago and two friends and I won free entries for it, but still had to pay for our trip there and all expenses. This was supposed to be a huge nationwide contest, but turned out to be a huge failure for the company running it. In the days before the contest we practised on the many Centipede machines they had in the convention centre or whatever the place was. They were all modified so each game would end after exactly three minutes and we had to pay for each game so we went through a lot of quarters. There were some mini contests where I won a little cash, which helped out. I vaguely remember 50,000 as being a good scoring goal for a three minute game.

"In the contest there were, I think, about a 100 people. We went head to head with the winner advancing. In the finals, I ended up playing against one of my friends who was only 14 or 15 at the time. The final game was not close at all and I won the prize which was supposed to be a Ford EXP car. Turns out that during the contest, the company





The photograph Eric took of Asteroids, with the extra ships literally running off the screen...

running it skipped town or went bankrupt or something. Basically they bailed out and there was some doubt whether anyone would get any prizes. Atari came through and gave me a cheque for a bit over $12,000 instead of the car, so everything worked out great."

A tidy sum for a teenager and suddenly the dream of making a living from playing games didn't seem quite so fanciful. Eric also cashed in on his Centipede skills by producing strategy guides and contributing to an article for *Joystik* magazine detailing his complicated mushroom arranging method.

"After that I wrote an advanced strategy article for every issue for around a year or so on games like Tempest, Dig Dug, Crystal Castles and Ms. Pac-Man. I loved doing these articles and the pay was extremely good. The magazine was very cool looking and well done. That was the only magazine I worked on but I did a bunch of other game related projects. I worked with some people doing a videogame TV show where I would interview people in arcades about games, but that one never went anywhere, and I was on some TV show that had a contest on Millipede.

"I was also part of a videogame professional tour that was called something like the 'Videogame Circus'. The idea was to have a group of videogame experts travel around to different cities and fill a big convention hall with games. People pay admission and get free game play, beat the expert contests, expert demos and things like that. The first one was in Boston and was a total failure. The attendance was so bad that the whole thing shut down after a few days and the whole tour was cancelled."

The dream was starting to fade, but fortunately for Eric, Atari came to the rescue again and recognised his gaming skills could be put to good use.



Eric joined *Joystik* magazine in January 1983, and contributed playing guides to the popular arcade games of the day

High scorer for hire

"I started out as a tester for Atari in 1983," remembers Eric. "A bunch of young arcade experts were hired as contractors to test arcade games being converted to several home computers such as the VIC-20, C64, IBM PC, Apple II, and TI-99. This was for the Atarisoft label and was totally separate from the Atari coin-op and VCS people. We did Centipede, Robotron, Defender, Pac-Man, Donkey Kong, Dig Dug and plenty more. We had all the real arcade games there and would play the computer versions and report bugs and major differences between the arcade and computer versions. All the programming was done by outside companies so we didn't have much contact with them other than with project managers for each game. It was like a real job with pay and everything, but we were contractors instead of employees, though after several months I became a full employee."

It can't have been easy for anyone involved to reproduce Atari coin-op classics accurately on those ancient platforms, but Eric is proud of what was achieved. "Most of the games were pretty good but yeah, they were extremely limited by what could be accomplished on those 'primitive' computers. The C64 games tended to be the best since it was the most game-friendly hardware and the IBM PC version of Robotron was surprisingly good. The Apple II games all looked and sounded terrible though."

Things were going well for Eric, but not so for Atari. Only two months after joining as a full-time employee, the company was sold and the Tramiel brothers took charge.

"It all seemed to happen very quickly and I think it was less than a week from the time we knew that it was coming until it actually happened. Up until then, things had been going normally for the most part. It was well known that Atari had been losing tons of money for quite awhile, but business continued as usual and even things like building a new headquarters were still being planned. We were kind of separated from the larger parts of the company so it was hard to know exactly what was going on. "After the sale, they went through each area and decided what people to keep. In my building, I think there were maybe 100 people and less than 10 ended up staying, and I was one of them. There was a lot of chaos with all those people leaving at once, and people trying to take stuff with them when they left. For most employees it was very sudden and they were told to leave that same day. I remember a few days of going to work in a giant building with only a handful of people left in it and we just waited around to find out what we were supposed to do next. It was much the same for all areas of the company. Instead of letting people go, they went through and

"I'm definitely most associated with Centipede because of winning the national contest in 1981. Atari gave me a cheque for $12,000..."





Ms. Pac-Man and Shanghai were written to test the water, and both games were quickly picked up by Atari

picked a few people to keep and everyone else was gone. A lot of people with many years at Atari were let go and there were some very large severance packages given out. I think Atari had something like 10,000 employees and the total number of people staying with the new Atari was under 200. I might be off on the numbers, but 1,000s of people were laid off."

Eric survived the cull and was pretty certain of the root cause. "The company was just way too big and couldn't support itself. There were lots of manager types, lots of people doing very specific jobs that could have been combined. The company was mostly living on reputation and not progressing to making new and improved products. The Tramiels had kind of a ruthless, hardcore, all-business reputation and that was right on target. I think the goal was to repeat the success of the C64 and make Atari something like IBM or Apple. It was a totally new company really, only the name was the same, and I think it was mostly on the right track. The products were generally good and of course it was a far more efficient company than the old one. The eventual failure was because the marketing of the products was poor and way too limited."

Go your own way

Perhaps sensing that with the new management team, no one was indispensable, Eric took the bold step of moving up from tester to programmer and with colleague and friend Jerome Strach, they produced two games for the Lynx handheld system in their own time, Ms. Pac-man and Shanghai. Both games were officially released and impressed the bosses enough for the pair to go on and produced three more titles – Batman Returns, Chequered Flag and Rampart, the latter two supporting the innovative link-up feature of Atari's ill-fated challenger to the GameBoy. Eric puts down its failure to high price, lack of third party support and poor marketing. It seems Atari learned little from the experience and repeated the same mistakes with their next big project, the Jaguar console.

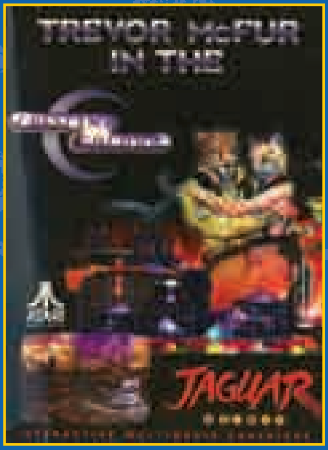
"I'd say people were somewhere between confident and over-confident when the Jaguar was getting started. It was supposed to be a super powerful 3D game system but turned out to be not that good at 3D graphics, at least in the beginning. It had the same problems as the Lynx – major game developers were not making games for it. After it was launched there were very few games available and even those weren't very good. As always it was marketed badly so it never really had a chance."

Eric produced one of the launch titles for the new console, sticking to his 2D roots when others were struggling, mostly unsuccessfully, with real time 3D rendering. He recalls with a grimace the difficult development process.

"It started with my ideas for a side scrolling shoot-em-up game, but the trouble started when too many people got their hands on it. One thing Atari wanted to do was have sort of a company mascot character like Mario or Sonic the Hedgehog and that's how the Trevor McFur character got into the game and it turned into Trevor McFur in the Crescent Galaxy. When it got closer to release time, I didn't really have any control of the design, so it was mostly just putting finishing touches on the content that was there so it could be wrapped up and sold. What's missing is all the detailed gameplay elements, secret areas and items, advanced weapons, things like that. It's basically the outline of the game I wanted to make but missing a lot of content. My game design style was kind of a problem too. I don't believe in making a detailed game design plan long before the game is finished. I believe that's mostly a waste of time as a game will usually turn out very different from the early design, so I prefer to do things on the fly. This was not a very popular method though. So the game was very much unfinished and generally not very good. It definitely qualifies as the game I'm least proud of and somewhat embarrassed about. I was disappointed that my opportunity to do an original game kind of fell apart."

Eric spent a few more months working on Club Drive and then, after a decade with the company, he decided to move on. Before we leave the Jaguar behind, I can't resist asking him about Atari's most famous UK programmer.

"Jeff Minter is an Atari legend," he enthuses. "I met him a few times briefly when he came to the company to show off his latest endeavours. The guy was in a league by himself and could make the Jaguar do things that even the hardware designers didn't know were possible. Whenever someone was curious about what the Jaguar was





Trevor McFur, not one of gaming history's most memorable characters...

capable of, someone would pull out one of his fancy demo programs that he whipped up in like an hour and amaze everyone. I think it's widely agreed that Tempest 2000 and Defender 2000 were by far the best Jaguar games. I never played them other than some early demos but even those were very impressive. He didn't actually work at Atari when I was there – he was always working at his home and would just visit the company once in awhile."

Gubble trouble

Eric continued to work in the games industry, joining Bitmasters, a company set up by two other former Atari employees, Franz Lanzinger and Dave O'Riva, and perhaps best remembered for producing Primal Rage. Eric worked on NCAA Final Four Basketball, also for the SNES (after learning to program the console by knocking out a version of Pong), and Pool Champion for the PC. He then followed Franz to Actual Entertainment, where was reunited with his old gaming buddy, Mark Robichek, the Frogger and Moon Patrol world record holder featured in last month's *Retro Gamer*. The fruits of their collaboration are Gubble and Gubble 2, which Eric describes as a mixture of Pac-Man and Crystal Castles.

"It was the best job I ever had by far. I spent most of my free time on the games because I enjoyed working on them so much. The most people we had at one point was five, so we had to do pretty much everything involved with making a game. I was making development tools, doing phone tech support, game design and testing as well as programming. The difference was we were doing a game the way we wanted instead of making one for someone else. I guess they could be considered successful. We created and sold two original, entirely self-funded games and made decent money, but not enough to continue making games. This pretty much convinced me that a small company is fighting a losing battle against the major productions that a lot of games are now. We did everything we wanted to do, but it was hard to get people to jump from liking the game to paying us lots of money for it."



Demos of both Gubble and its sequel are available for download from www.actualentertainment.com

So, Eric left the games industry, worked for Cradle Technologies on custom programming for its processor before retiring at the grand old age of 40. But though games no longer provide his employment, they still occupy a huge part of his time. In fact, you could say his life has been rather circular. He now shares his house with five arcade cabinets – Xevious, Crystal Castles, Cloak and Dagger, Frenzy and Joust – and along with watching baseball and playing poker with Asteroids programmer, Ed Logg, he can usually be found heavily engrossed in Everquest 2.

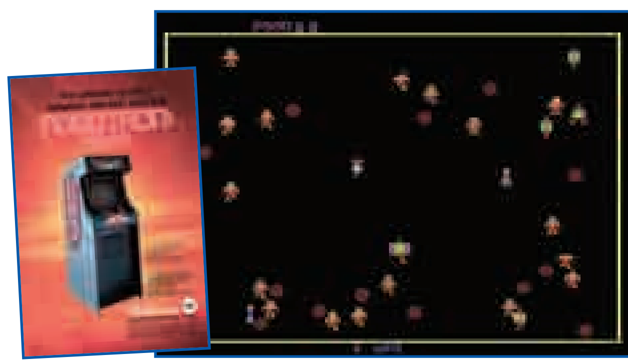
"I'm happily single and currently spend most of my time playing computer games. For me it couldn't be better, but I lead what most people would consider a boring life."

No, Eric. It's called a charmed life.



›Eric Ginner's Desert Island Disks

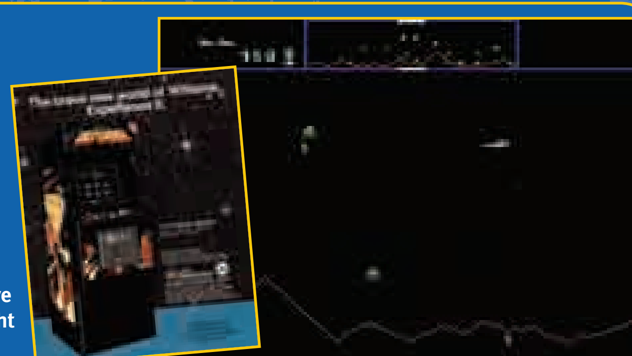
Robotron 2084



Arcade, Williams, 1982

The sheer amount of stuff on the screen was amazing for the time. It just seemed impossible to survive against all those enemies coming at you but it was so satisfying mowing them down. Loved the dual joystick controls and all the firepower. The greed element of trying to collect the little people wandering around was something I liked in a lot of games. I played it for something like 30 hours straight in a contest once which was the only time I did a marathon session like that. I saved up hundreds of extra lives so it was possible to eat or run to the restroom without losing the game. I remember, though, after many hours, losing so many lives that I got down to only two left but held on and built them back up again.

Defender



Arcade, Williams, 1980

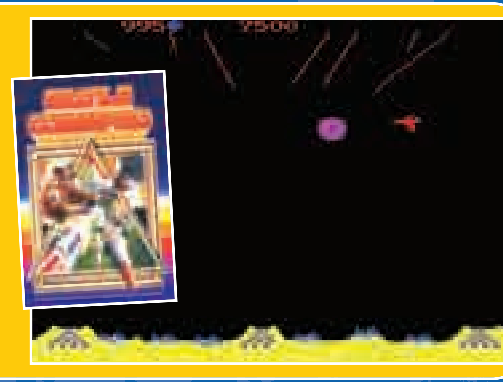
It's similar to Robotron in that it's just a lot of mayhem and destruction. I remember the first time I saw it thinking how can anyone play that with all those buttons? Of course it just took some getting used to but even harder than using all the controls was finding a machine where all the controls were actually in working condition. I wonder how long they would hold out on the island. It felt like you had a lot more control over your ship than in most games though.

Coolest thing about the game? Floating around at the beginning of a wave waiting for all the pods to gather... then boom! – smart bomb at just the right time followed by the massive explosions and frame-rate slowdown.

Missile Command

Arcade, Atari, 1980

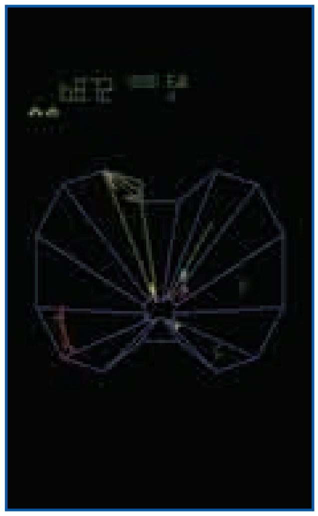
This is the first game I remember that had real colours and not just vector graphics. That huge trackball was pretty wild at the time. I remember trying to optimise points by using as few shots as possible and hitting the branching lines with one shot. As it got harder I would spread a wave of clouds across at the start of each wave then use individual shots after that. The hard part was hitting those smart diamonds. They could pull off some crazy moves dancing around clouds and struggling to avoid them. It was so annoying to make the wave of clouds and then see the wave start off with diamonds instead of lasers and the clouds all get wasted. Eventually a good strategy was to just protect one city and survive on the bonus cities every 10,000 points. As an extra bonus, Missile Command makes a great light source. Some of those background colours are blinding.



Tempest

Arcade, Atari, 1980

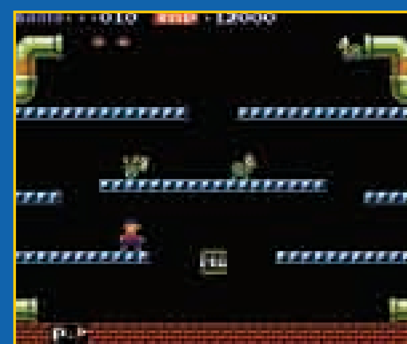
I liked the feature that allowed you to work your way up to high levels and start new games there. It was a nice change from other games in that you could attempt to beat your high score without taking hours to do it. It has possibly some of the most frustrating ways to die of any game. Those annoying pulsars zapping you from way down inside the grid. Those crazy fuseballs popping up at just the wrong time. The invisible grid levels were a big surprise and would always draw a crowd.



Mario Bros.

Arcade, Nintendo, 1983

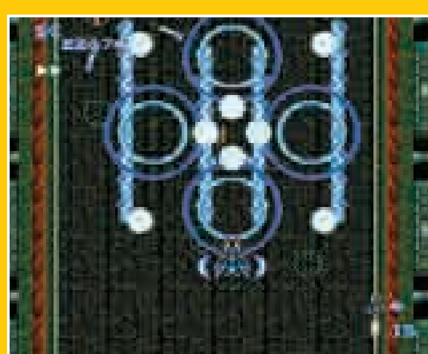
I really liked the two player co-operative mode. The single player mode was fun also but I don't know exactly why. It's a pretty simple game with nothing really special about it. I think it was the challenge of always seeing a few seconds ahead and avoiding potential traps. The two player mode is twice as good and it has the added fun of Mario and Luigi bumping each other around and jumping off of each other.



Blazing Lazers

TurboGrafx-16, Hudson Soft, 1989

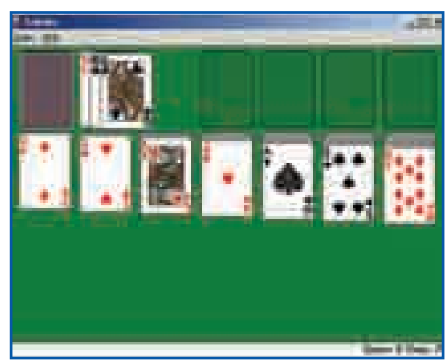
This is my obscure representative for scrolling third-person shooting games. It was on the TurboGrafx-16 and had all the classic shooter elements such as wild background graphics, rocking music, lots of power-ups, the gradual build up from a weak little ship to a super powerful machine. This was always the style of game I wanted to do for my first original game.



Solitaire

PC, Microsoft

Yes it's boring and simple but that's the point. It's good to have a game around that you can just play for a few minutes and accomplish something. It has unlimited replay value since every game is random. It also has the most important quality that I think any game can have, which is that when you finish a game you feel like you could do better if you played again.

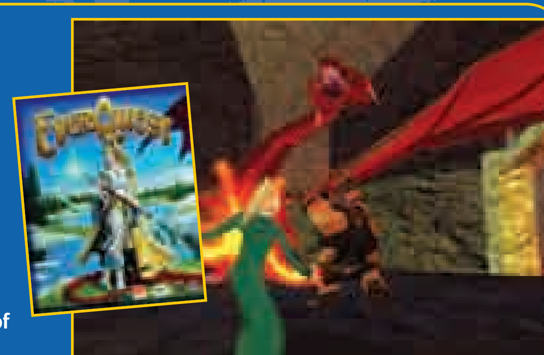


Everquest

PC, Verdant Interactive, 1999

The most amazing combination of really good game design and really terrible game design. I played it for years and the reason was the ability to play with friends. Back in the old days my friends and I would just show up at the arcade after work or school and meet up to play games. Logging into the game was somewhat like that – friends would log in and gather up to do things. It was all about impressing other people with your items and accomplishments. How can a game be successful when it forces players to spend most of their time waiting around doing nothing? Just one of a mile long list of bad things about it and yet it's probably my favourite game ever.

Is there DSL on the island? Because I don't think I could build a satellite dish out of coconuts and bamboo.





THE HISTORY OF STAR WARS VIDEOGAMES

EPISODE III

REVENGE OF THE PC

Last month we followed the ups and downs of Star Wars gaming as it grew out of the 8-bit home computer market and rode the wave of console gaming into the mid-90s. In this final chapter Dan Whitehead picks up the story as the home PC went from being a fancy-pants calculator and started to make its mark as a games machine, right up to the release of the Star Wars prequel movies...







The first X-Wing title blasted onto the PC in 1993, and add-on packs and sequels quickly followed

While the *Star Wars* platform games had been making waves on the NES and SNES, the software division of George Lucas' empire, LucasArts, had been making something of a name for itself on the PC with games outside of the realms of Jedi and droids.

The late 80s and early 90s saw such classic adventures as Maniac Mansion, Zak McKraken and, of course, the start of the Monkey Island franchise. The other Lucas cashcow, Indiana Jones, had also been successfully translated into the old point-and-click genre, with an adventure based on The Last Crusade and also a whole new Indy escapade entitled The Fate of Atlantis, so it was only a matter of time before the company treated the rapidly growing audience of PC gamers to some *Star Wars* action.

X marks the spot

Despite being known for its adventure games on the platform, LucasArts' first PC offering was, in many ways, a throwback to Atari's original 1983 arcade machine, only now boasting polygon graphics and beefed up from a simple shooter into a fully-fledged flight simulation. X-Wing was the self-explanatory title, and it hit the shelves in 1993 to much excitement. With the console concentration on platform leaping and baddie blasting, the bygone thrill of piloting *Star Wars* vessels had gone unexplored for several years. With the advance in PC graphics, hopping into the cockpit of that iconic fighter was a tantalising proposition.

No mere 3D shoot-em-up, X-Wing's joystick and keyboard combo required plenty of practice to master, while the ELS system (Engines, Lasers, Shields) allowed gamers to share their ship's power between those three vital areas. In retrospect, the game was a fairly linear affair and the flat polygons from the original release are pretty ugly. Later re-releases would spruce up the looks with some great gourad shading effects. The PC hard drive also allowed LucasArts to build on the original game with expansion packs, and within a year X-Wing addicts could pick up two such add-ons, B-Wing and Imperial Pursuit, helping to extend the rather limited core game and build a somewhat rabid fanbase.

Flushed by the speedy success of this foray into PC gaming, a sequel followed in 1994. TIE Fighter flipped the whole thing on its head and, for the first time, allowed players to fight on the side of Darth Vader and the Empire. Gameplay was much the same as X-Wing, the quick turnaround not really allowing room for massive overhaul of the game engine. Even so, there were some improvements that addressed problems with the dogfighting in the previous title. A quick-key shortcut allowed you to automatically match the speed of an enemy, so you could concentrate on actually fighting them rather than chasing them, while a tractor beam weapon could be used to stop craft flying away. As with X-Wing, two expansion packs – Defender of the Empire and Enemies of the Empire – followed in the same year. Between the two games, and the brace of add-on missions, *Star Wars* had hit the PC in fine form.

A certain point of view

Of course, 1994 also saw the release of a PC game the effects of which we're still feeling in 2005 – a charming little tale of demons and space marines called Doom. Though the first-person shooter genre had been around in various forms for many years, and truly came into its own with Wolfenstein 3D, few would argue that Doom didn't cement the FPS genre into the dominant force we know today. Naturally, LucasArts was quick to realise the sales potential of this hot new genre, and just how excited *Star Wars* fans would be to blast Stormtroopers in glorious first-person perspective.

Dark Forces debuted on the PC in 1995, and quite apart from being a great shooter, it remains notable for many reasons. From a technical standpoint, Dark Forces managed to take the Doom blueprint and make some improvements which helped to evolve the FPS genre. For one thing, the blasting action was tempered with a sense of strategy and even outright puzzle sections. The environments were more immersive, with fog effects and revolving holograms in the background, and the level design was complex. Players could also look up and down, opening up the gameplay from the forward-facing maze chases of Doom.

But within LucasArts, Dark Forces represented an even greater shift in direction – it was the first game to tell a new *Star Wars* story outside of the official movie chronology. Previous titles had always followed the events of the classic trilogy, stretching certain events and taking some artistic liberties, but always within the guidelines of what George Lucas had put on-screen. With the inclusion of a new Imperial threat – the Dark Troopers – and an all-new story that slotted in between *A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes back*, this was the first time gamers had been allowed to explore outside the mainstream *Star Wars* narrative.

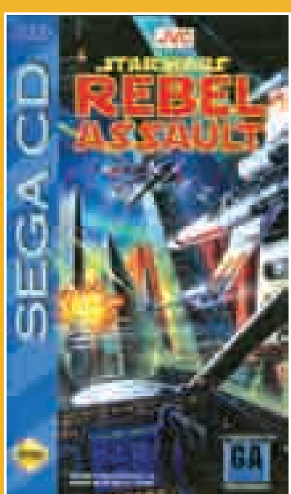
Expanding horizons

The Expanded Universe, as it came to be known, was the name given to all the comics, novels and other spin-offs that contributed stories to the *Star Wars* saga once the movies left the cinema. Though their relationship to the official movie continuity has always been dubious, there's no denying that it was this steady stream of new *Star Wars* content that kept the fanbase alert and interested during the early-to-mid 90s.

In 1996, LucasArts decided to experiment with the Expanded Universe a little to see if they could engineer an event with which to drum up publicity for the forthcoming Special Edition

›Rebel scum

In 1995 the *Star Wars* template was applied to another popular game style, this time the FMV-driven space shooting of Wing Commander. Rebel Assault was the game – released on PC, Mega-CD and the doomed 3DO console – and it boasted actual footage from the movies! Gasp! Of course, this meant the game was CD-ROM only (and thus very posh) and had to stream all the gameplay straight from the CD. Despite the digitised movie scenes, the game itself was cripplingly linear and little more than a shooting gallery. A sequel appeared the following year, with more varied gameplay and a unique selling point – the first new and official *Star Wars* footage to be shot since *Return of the Jedi*. The game still wasn't up to much though, as between Dark Forces and X-Wing fans could already get the same thrills from far better games.



re-releases of the original movie trilogy. What they came up with was Shadows of the Empire. Not only would this be a videogame, there were Shadows of the Empire action figures, a comic book, a novel – even a soundtrack CD!

The story followed a new *Star Wars* hero, mercenary Dash Rendar, whose story intersected with those of Han Solo and Luke Skywalker. Despite being technically neutral in the war against the Empire, Rendar found himself siding with the Rebellion and was involved in the battle on Hoth. Helping in the search for Han Solo after the events of *Empire Strikes Back*, he was then asked by Princess Leia to investigate a conspiracy to murder Luke by the sinister Prince Xizor of the Black Sun crime syndicate. Of course, all this took place in between the movies and was never mentioned on-screen.

The Shadows of the Empire game continued the Lucas bias towards Nintendo, appearing as an N64 exclusive – though a PC version was also released. While titles like X-Wing and Dark Forces had taken a genre and dressed it up in *Star Wars* clothing, Shadows was a patchwork of different gamestyles designed to appeal to as many people as possible, quite fitting given the marketing driven genesis of the concept.

It opened with, predictably enough, the battle on Hoth against the AT-ATs. This snowy skirmish was clearly a fan favourite when it came to gaming, and its inclusion in Shadows as the first level can be seen as a rather cynical attempt to get the fans hooked with an easy hit from the start. The game then shifted to third-person view for sections in which Rendar tracked the bounty hunters IG-88 and Boba Fett on the trail of Han Solo, before leading him into conflict against the villainous Prince Xizor. As *Star Wars* stories go, it was passable enough – though the events sat awkwardly in the middle of two movies that didn't mention them at all – but the game itself was of dubious value.

By trying to cover so many game genres – flying, exploring, shooting, racing – the game fell short and never really came together as a cohesive whole. Plagued by clumsy camera angles, the on-foot sections could be played in third or first person perspective, but it was no Dark Forces. Equally, the flying sections weren't up to the standard of X-Wing. The addition of pointless features such as an overhead camera, or a 'movie' camera that cut to different viewpoints during play suggests that LucasArts was more interested in something that could act as a surrogate movie than in creating a game that was worth playing.

The Shadows of the Empire 'multimedia project' certainly attracted a lot of interest, both from fans and the media, but Dash Rendar didn't really make much of an impact on the franchise in the long term. Where the experiment did have an impact was in showing LucasArts that there was a market for *Star Wars* games that extrapolated unseen events from the movies, and from this point on almost every new game would ignore the movie storylines in favour of playing in the Expanded Universe.

Return of the Dark Forces

The criticism levelled at Shadows of the Empire seemed to find its mark, as 1997 found LucasArts returning to familiar, but fruitful, territory with sequels to its two biggest successes.

Jedi Knight was the follow-up to Dark Forces, and it took the technical advances in PC technology over the intervening two years and turned in yet another superb shooter with yet more innovations in the genre. For the first time, you could use a lightsaber in a first-person game, putting gamers up close and personal in a series of startling duels. This game saw another new character added to the *Star Wars* canon, Kyle Katarn, the first in what would be a long line of hitherto unmentioned Jedi lurking in the background of the movies. The FPS was now a firmly established genre, with Quake moving things into the realms of full 3D and building on Doom's tentative online and network play

Since the release of the original, Dark Forces has gone from strength to strength, with the excellent fourth game, Jedi Academy, appearing on PC and Xbox last year







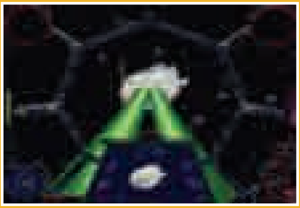


›The best retro Star Wars games

Star Wars (Arcade)
Because it's the daddy of them all. Because it's retro arcade greatness personified. But mostly because it's just an awesome game.



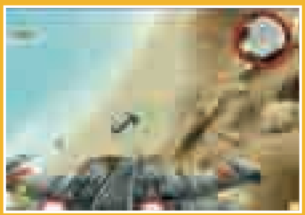
X-Wing vs TIE Fighter (PC)
But only with the Balance of Power expansion pack. Deep space dogfighting? On that new-fangled Internet? Yes please!



Super Empire Strikes Back (SNES)
The *Star Wars* platform game perfected, with a fine blend of Mode 7 graphics, fast-paced exploration and frantic blasting.

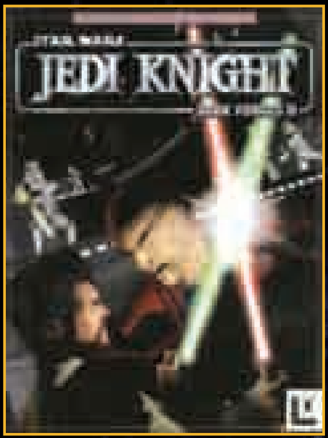
Dark Forces (PC)
Technically, Jedi Knight is superior, but that's also too similar to today's FPS games to scratch that retro itch.

Rogue Squadron (N64)
As good as vehicular action gets for console gamers. Plus, the best version of the obligatory Hoth battle. Ever.



with a dedicated multiplayer system. Jedi Knight was no different, and multiplayer lightsaber action across the Internet was at last a reality.

The other big *Star Wars* release of 1997 also used the Internet to distinguish itself from the pack – though the result wasn't quite as popular as Jedi Knight's winning formula. X-Wing vs TIE Fighter was the game, and by combining its two hugely successful space combat sims with the lure of online dogfighting, LucaAarts should've been onto a winner. Neither X-Wing nor TIE Fighter had included any sort of multiplayer options, so there was a ready-made audience of die hard fans who had honed their skills against computer controlled enemies and were champing at the bit to test themselves against their peers. Sadly, the game was not well received by these fans who had waited several years for the chance to blast their friends. For one, the single player missions were disappointingly short, had no narrative and



Finally – the chance to introduce your lightsaber to those pesky Imperial droids

seemed to have been bolted on as an afterthought. With Internet access still not widespread, this made those uninterested in – or incapable of – online play less than happy. Unfortunately even for those who did have the required kit, the online play was far from great. The difference in power and ability between various craft meant that fights could be painfully one-sided if matches weren't handicapped to give every player a fighting chance.

The lack of 3D card support, and somewhat choppy online play that required the visuals to be stripped bare for maximum speed, also added to the general air of dissatisfaction that surrounded the launch. Most fans were able to make the best of it, and with lowered expectations the basic melee battles could be fun.

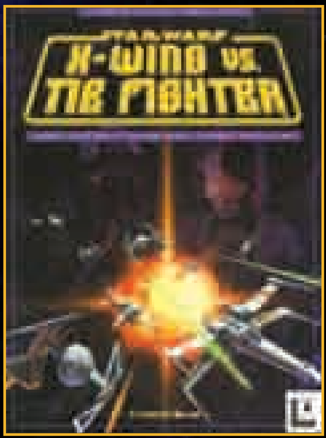
Thankfully, 1998 saw the now-obligatory expansion pack, Balance of Power, and this addressed almost all of the problems that players had suffered in the original release. Despite the sour taste from having to make another purchase in order to get the game they wanted, the fan community soon accepted that blowing your friend's TIE Fighter to atoms with a proton torpedo was worth the wait.











X-Wing vs TIE Fighter lured players with the promise of massive online multiplayer battles

A New Beginning

By now, *Star Wars* fans had witnessed the Special Editions of the original trilogy, thrilled at the chance to see them again on the big screen – and screamed bloody murder at the changes wrought on their childhood classics.

It was also common knowledge that a whole new trilogy was in the works, and that we would finally get to see how Obi Wan muffed everything up and let Anakin Skywalker turn into the galaxy's most lethal asthmatic. Naturally, the LucasArts games nozzle was juiced up and ready to start pumping out *Star Wars* product into our faces at every possible turn.

Returning to the console market, 1998 saw the release of one of the best *Star Wars* games and also one of the worst. Rogue Squadron for the N64 was yet another title that took peripheral characters and events from the movies and followed them off into all-new stories. Based around an elite group of Rebellion pilots led by Wedge Antilles, one of Luke's X-Wing pilot buddies (played in the movies by Ewan McGregor's uncle, Dennis Lawson), the Rogue Squadron concept had already been established in spin-off novels and comics. The game once again found LucasArts going back to the Hoth battle for easy thrills, but with a focus on arcade aerial combat you won't have heard fans complaining too much. Outside of the PC sim titles, Rogue Squadron is still the best of the *Star Wars* vehicle games and the franchise is still going strong today on the GameCube.

But with every silver lining there must come a dirty great cloud, and in this case it came in the grey oblong shape of the PlayStation. With the N64 struggling to make an impression, *Star Wars* games began to appear on other formats, with Sony's hip games machine top of the list. First came PlayStation ports of Dark Forces and Rebel Assault 2, then came the first exclusive *Star Wars* PlayStation entry. And it was bad. Really bad.

By now, the *Star Wars* brand had been applied to pretty much every popular genre possible. Every genre except one. The beat-em-up. The advent of the 32-bit consoles had seen the fighting game go through a seismic shift not unlike the one that rippled through the PC shooter genre with Doom. Tekken, Virtua Fighter, Toshinden – polygon pugilism was all the rage. And so the world was made to suffer Masters of Teras Kasi.

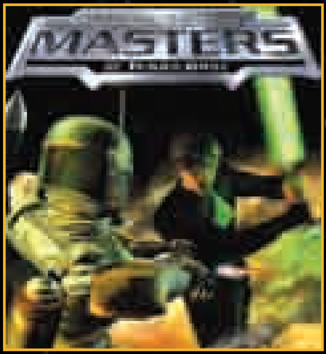
Based around a Jedi martial art invented for the occasion, this rushed fighter tossed a grab bag of *Star Wars* characters into one-on-one combat with little thought or care for remaining faithful to the films. Thus Han Solo and Chewie fought to the death, Darth Vader duelled with a Tusken Raider and fans wept silent tears of horror at the stiff animation, uninspired fight mechanics and the unpleasant smell of a franchise being milked. It was a smell they would soon grow tired of.

The beginning of the end

The Phantom Menace was now hurtling towards Star Wars fandom like a rancor monster with piles, and feverish excitement was the order of the day. LucasArts produced two more PC titles based on the classic trilogy before clearing the decks for the prequel onslaught. Star Wars: Supremacy was yet another successful genre dressed up in Jedi robes – this time the resource-harvesting strategy of Command & Conquer. Playing as either Empire or Rebellion, and set just after the destruction of the first Death Star, players had to muster their forces to control planets while driving the enemy back into deep space. The first game to take a step back from visceral action, Supremacy (released as







The final few Star Wars games of the 1990s. From left to right: the good, the bad and the damn right ugly





The X-Wing series ended on the high, with the mostly excellent Alliance

Rebellion outside the UK) once again found a game that tried to ape a popular existing franchise, but came up woefully short in comparison. Poor pacing meant that gamers needed superhuman reflexes to cope with the deluge of information windows cluttering the screen, and the ugly graphics didn't do much to entice strategy fans to stick around. LucasArts would attempt strategy again in 2000 with Force Commander, which swapped spaceships for ground troops, but was, if anything, even worse to play.

Far better was X-Wing Alliance, a welcome return to serious simulator territory and a game that dared to expand on previous games without stumbling along the way. Bolstered by one of the best stories to grace a *Star Wars* game, you starred as a young pilot with no allegiance to either Rebellion or Empire. Indeed, your main priority was to keep the family business afloat. Of course, destiny soon comes calling and you find yourself drawn into the war against the Imperial forces, culminating in an impressive final set of missions during the attack on the second Death Star above Endor. With a compelling story, genuine drama, 50 single player missions and a solid multiplayer skirmish mode, Alliance provided a fitting end to the beloved X-Wing series.

The year 1999 was, as we all know, when *Star Wars* both exploded and imploded all at once. *Episode I* hit cinemas, and left legions of fans struggling to cope with the conflicting highs and lows of finally getting a new *Star Wars* movie and realising that the magic had dimmed over the years. The *Star Wars* gaming scene was similarly confused.

Lucas, remembering all too well the delay in getting merchandise on the shelves back in 1977, swamped the shelves with an endless array of *Star Wars* tat, much of it aimed at pre-schoolers. This also led to such strange sights as the educational *Star Wars* CD-ROM package, Pit Droids on the PC and Macintosh, and other quirky niche offerings, such as the Zelda-esque Yoda Stories 'desktop adventure' for the PC.

The official game version of the long-awaited movie formed a suitably frustrating companion piece to the film. *The Phantom Menace*, released on PC and PlayStation, was little more than a top-down maze game which followed the plot of the film with a seemingly endless number of battle droids to hack through with your lightsaber. As you could simply stand still and automatically deflect their blaster fire back at them without touching a single button, the greatest challenge was to your patience – the vast featureless levels and poorly designed jumping sections proving more deadly than any Sith conspiracy.

And this, sadly, is where our story must end. 1999 brings us neatly to the start of the new *Star Wars* trilogy and, in a wonderful piece of temporal kismet, the beginning of the current generation of gaming with the launch of the PlayStation 2 in 2000.

That's almost 20 years of *Star Wars* related gaming we've sped through in just three issues, two decades that left fans both ecstatic and agonising at the way their beloved galaxy was treated. It's not changed much, has it? Maybe we'll be back in 2025, older and wiser, for a look back at how *Revenge of the Sith* fared in the land of games. Until then, live long and prosper.

No, wait. May the Force be with you! That's the one.

›The worst retro Star Wars games

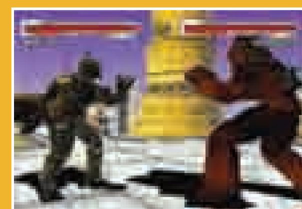
Return of the Jedi (Arcade)
A sloppy Zaxxon clone marred by shonky controls and a horrible camera angle. And Ewoks. Not even Virtual Billy Dee can save it.

Star Wars Jedi Arena (Atari 2600)
Pointless deflection game with only passing relevance to the Star Wars saga. A shameful cash-in from Parker Brothers.

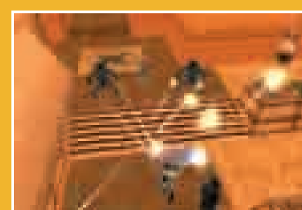
Super Return of the Jedi (SNES)
Not entirely awful, but the weakest of the SNES series and a cluttered mess of brainless twitch-gaming nonsense.

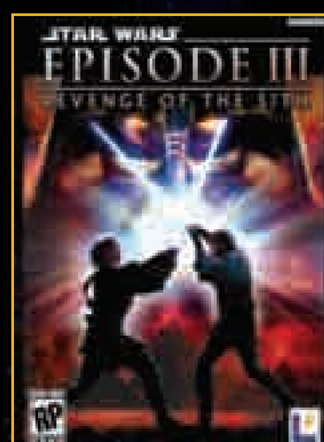


Masters of Teras Kasi (PlayStation)
A truly grim beat-em-up in which Darth Vader minces like a pixie, while Han and Chewie punch each other. Rock bottom.



The Phantom Menace (PlayStation)
As deflated as the movie, the only challenge in this bland and characterless maze game was making pixel-perfect leaps.





The future of Star Wars videogames? Revenge of the Sith is due out in May, on just about every platform you can swing a lightsaber at

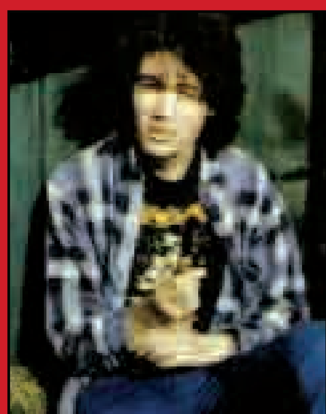
DELTA

Delta 4 was responsible for some of the funniest adventure games ever written, with titles like Bored of the Rings and the Boggit raising smiles long before LucasArts got in on the act. Chris Wild picks up the adventure trail and sets off in search of the man behind Delta 4, Fergus McNeill...

When you think back to the early 1980s, the so-called golden age of computer games, there is one thing that strikes home above all else; that anyone who wanted to (and had the conviction to do it, not to mention a small amount of talent) could release and sell a game. Of those who did, some even managed to be successful and forge a name for themselves, something that rarely happens for individuals nowadays.

One such person was Fergus McNeill and his development team, Delta 4. From its humble beginnings, selling home-taped games with photocopied inlays at computer fairs, to releasing the first licensed product of Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series, Delta 4 seemed to be on the verge of global success, a meteoric rise to the top of interaction fiction confirmed with the release of the critically acclaimed adventure, The Big Sleaze, in 1987. This was followed by the launch of its serious label, Abstract Concepts, along with the dsytopian adventure Mindfighter, and a collaboration with fellow adventurers Level 9. But then, something went wrong and Delta 4 disappeared like a 1920's explorer lost in an Aztec temple...

To find out exactly what happened, we've spoke at length to the Fergus McNeil, and here, in a style we're sure he'd appreciate, is the rise and fall of Delta 4.



The man behind the Delta 4 myth, Fergus McNeill

› LOAD DELTA 4

You stand in the middle of an Aztec temple. There are no exits. You can see a bottle of Vodka and some old Marillion *gatefold LPs. A tall man in a jester's outfit approaches...*

› EXAMINE DELTA 4

Fergus says: "Delta 4 came about entirely by accident. I'd been dabbling in the dark arts of bedroom game development for some time, when I was struck with the idea of selling my wares via mail order and decided I needed a name for the whole undertaking. The name is actually a constant cause of embarrassment for me. I've taken to telling wild stories about how I was shipwrecked on the Nile Delta on the 4th of August when the name came to me in a dream. I think there could be some mileage in this, possibly even a movie, and it's much more interesting than saying that my dad came up with the name to end an argument."

› VERBOSE

In 1984, inspired by the likes of The Hobbit and Colossal Adventure, Fergus sat down and wrote his first adventure, Sherwood Forest, in Spectrum BASIC. At 14, when most male teens should be at school studying girls, Fergus began selling his games via mail order through Micro Adventure *magazine.*

"The Quill was a godsend. Developing the early works using Spectrum BASIC was about as much fun as being punched in the face"

Fergus says: "I remember playing The Hobbit – Thorin singing about gold, the pale bulbous eyes, climbing into barrels, the sense of tension going north from Dale towards the Lonely Mountain – and I wanted to make games like that. Somehow, I never quite managed it, but I did turn out a few adventures that raised a smile."

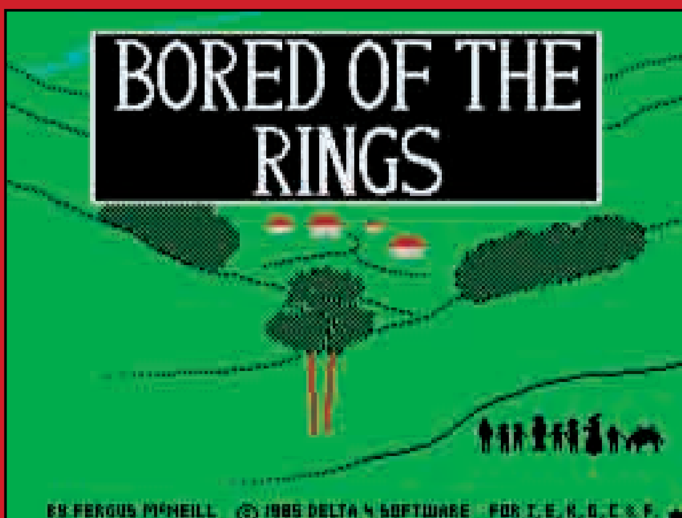
› INVENTORY

Fergus says: "The Delta 4 Posse (as such things were known in the 80s) emerged from a clique of friends at school. Under normal circumstances, I should probably change names to protect the innocent. However, nobody involved in Delta 4 was particularly innocent, at least not for long. Judith Child was my long-term collaborator. She acted as a sounding-board for the numerous daft ideas that evolved, assisted with the overall development, and organised everything. She also attacked disrespectful journalists, an approach which probably contributed to our frequently high review scores.

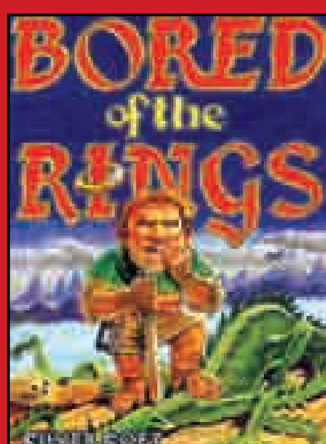
"Andrew 'Spud' Sprunt was our staff photographer and general drinking companion for the regular late-night inspiration-gathering trips to the golf course. Colin Buckett was one of those programmers who could get a BBC Model B to do anything, even if he had to take it apart to make it do it. When he wasn't taking things apart (which he did most of the time), he helped with conversion work and generally thrashed us at Elite. Jason Somerville worked on various projects and also assisted with the nightmare of conversions in the early days – a process which involved manually retyping everything from the Spectrum version of the Quill into the Amstrad or C64 version of the Quill. No wonder we drank a lot!

"Honourable mentions must also go to Jonathan Walker (the

4-EVA







Following its successful debut as a mail order title (left), CRL picked up Bored and released the game on its Silversoft label

talented fellow who designed most of the cover art for our original mail-order titles), Andy 'Zippy' Routledge (who co-designed and developed The Smirking Horror), and Stephanie Stranger (who worked with me on the Bizarre Wars design for Level 9)."

› EXAMINE BORED OF THE RINGS

While studying at Swanmore Secondary School, Judith slipped Fergus a copy of Harvard Lampoon's Bored of the Rings. *Fergus began to read the parody novel and nearly had the book confiscated for laughing out loud in class…*

Fergus says: "We thought it would be great fun to adapt the *Bored Of The Rings* book and tried to contact the rights holders (a bold move for two teenagers still at school). However, after numerous phone calls all leading to dead ends we rashly decided to write our own parody instead. Some people may say our choice of title was somewhat unoriginal but everything else about it was all our own work."

Bored of the Rings was Delta 4's break through product. As with all the previous games it was released mail order. One of the magazines commented that by giving the game a good review, Delta 4's home publishing department would be unable to keep up with demand, and thus appeared to review it less favourably. However the game buying public were undeterred and bought it in their thousands regardless, with the net result being that Delta 4's home publishing department was unable to keep up with demand… The success brought it to the attention of CRL Managing Director Clement Chambers, who signed Delta 4 to his affiliate label Silversoft and the game was re-launched. In fact the game would be launched yet again under the CRL label some time later.

Fergus says: "There were several versions of Bored Of The Rings but they weren't hugely different. However, we were asked to do an extended edition aimed, I seem to recall, at that disk-based Spectrum machine. It was to be called B-B-Bored Of The Remix and we got some way into development. It was never finished but, being an environmentally friendly sort of person (well, I've nothing against the environment), I recycled some of those ideas years later in Kingdom O' Magic."

› EXAMINE COLOUR OF MAGIC

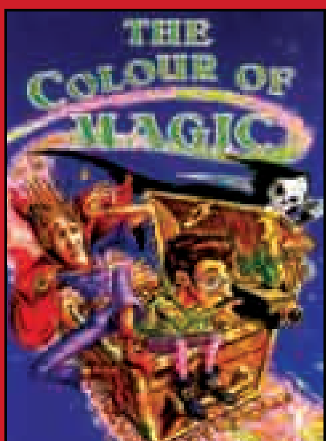
Bored of the Rings was followed by Robin of Sherlock, a parody of both Robin Hood and Sherlock Holmes, and The Boggit, another Tolkien takeoff. In 1986, Delta 4 momentarily stopped the spoofs and released The Colour of Magic, based on the first of Terry Pratchet's Discworld *novels.*

Fergus says: "Ah yes, *Discworld.* The whole incident came about as a result of my selfish tendency to buy people presents that appeal to me, regardless of their personal tastes. In this case, the recipient was my arch-nemesis from O-

›Class of '86

1986 was a fine year for Delta 4, with the Boggit and The Colour of Magic earning great reviews from the specialist press. Looking back at the year's adventure games, *Crash* magazine (#36) heaped praise on Level 9. Kind words were also reserved for Fergus: "The other big name of 1986 was undoubtedly Fergus McNeill of Delta 4 who mined quite a different seam. Humour was always an area which the medium of adventuring could develop to its full, and Delta 4 were not slow in spotting this simple fact. The Quill, for once, provided a useful vehicle to express a budding comic talent. Delta 4 had always secured a loyal following among adventure freaks, but this year saw the outfit's rise to fame and chart respectability epitomised by the tremendous amount of interest in The Boggit, a game which successfully lampoons the Melbourne House classic."





The first and arguably the best of all the games based on Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* novels

Level English class, Catherine. I was browsing in my local bookshop and my eye fell on the Josh Kirby artwork for *The Colour Of Magic*. By very good fortune, Catherine enjoyed the book and recommended that I read it, which I did.

"Some time later, when I was in discussions with Piranha about doing a project with them, somebody asked me what license I would like to work on if one could be secured. I immediately suggested *The Colour of Magic* and, after a respectable period, Terry Pratchett was picking me up from Bristol Templemeads and whisking me away to meet his carnivorous plant collection. We got on rather well, especially when he suggested 'The Pub That Time Forgot' for lunch. But that's another story..."

› GET QUILL

Delta 4 was an early adopter of Gilsoft's adventure writing system The Quill, and became arguably the biggest contributor to its profile. Many bedroom programmers were inspired by the story of Fergus the 16-year-old game developer, and pursued a career in programming, finding their feet with adventures written using Gilsoft's utility.

Fergus says: "The Quill was a godsend. Developing the early works using Spectrum BASIC was about as much fun as being punched in the face. The problem was that you spent all of your time programming locations rather than writing them and, while I could program BASIC pretty well, the whole creative process was rather stifled. Gosh, that last bit sounded a bit pretentious... Suffice to say, The Quill made everything more structured and speeded up the development process enormously."

"*Crash* were a strange lot... Derek Brewster just refused to be amused"

› SAY GILSOFT

Fergus says: "I can't be certain how the relationship with Gilsoft started, but I think we first met at a ZX Microfair. The relationship, which I must stress was always platonic, developed as a result of me asking them for new features all the time."

After the first couple of small releases (and a relentless barrage of demands for extra functionality), Gilsoft began to take notice of how Fergus was using its authoring system, and started to make modifications to it especially for Delta 4 games.

Fergus says: "I think it was a combination of Tim Gilberts and his crew being genuinely nice helpful guys, and the fact that good reviews for Delta 4 games highlighted what a fantastic tool The Quill was. Lots of authoring utilities claimed to be suitable for developing commercial games, but The Quill had actually done it for real."

The relationship continued for several years, with Gilsoft later developing a whole new adventure system for Abstract Concepts (Delta 4's serious adventure label). Called SWAN (System Without A Name), this was essentially a super-charged reworking of Gilsoft's PAW (Professional Adventure Writer) and was designed to be the engine for all future titles.

› READ PRESS

From very early on, Fergus recognised that courting the press was a major contributory factor to good game sales. Quest for the Holy Joystick was a spoof of the software industry and featured many popular gaming magazines of the time. Before long, Delta 4 had a good (if somewhat unusual) relationship with most of the 8-bit press.

Fergus says: "Tony Bridge from *Popular Computing Weekly* started it all by giving us our first serious coverage. A chance meeting at a Microfair led to a first 'proper' review and after that things just snowballed. Chris Bourne and the guys at *Sinclair User* were fantastic, despite the fact that we stormed their offices at EMAP Towers and soaked the editor with water pistols, not to mention covering Chris in silly string at a ZX Microfair. He later explained that this was the reason he continually referred to me as 'a bit of a cult' in his Gremlin column, hoping that one day a typesetting error would avenge him...

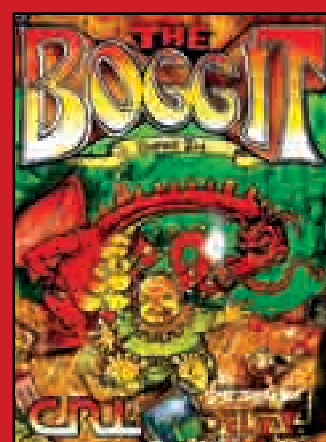
"*Crash* were a strange lot though. I got on fine with some of the Newsfield staff writers, especially the guys from *Amtix*, but Derek Brewster (adventure reviewer for *Crash*) just refused to be amused. I had no problem with this – comedy is a subjective thing after all – but I did breathe a sigh of relief when The Big Sleaze finally made him smile."

› EXPLAIN BEASTENDERS

Shortly after the release of The Big Sleaze, Your Sinclair reported that Delta 4 was working on 'Beastenders', a spoof of the BBC soap.

Fergus says: "I had spent a long day at a show drinking intoxicants, and a journalist began

The Boggit, or 'Bored Too' as it was subtitled, marked a welcome return to 'Muddle Earth'



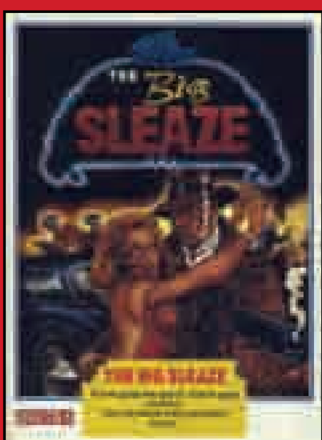


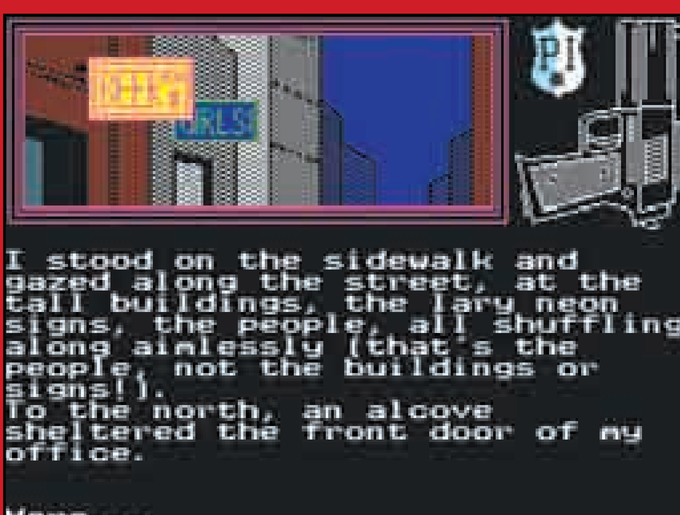
asking me questions… you know how these rumours can start. Honestly, it was never a serious concept, as I couldn't bear having to do the research! As a rule I only parody subject-matter that I really like."

› FIND LEVEL 9

Fergus says: "The adventure industry was, in those days, small and cosy enough for everyone to know everyone else. I always got on reasonably well with Level 9's Mike and Pete Austin – they were technically amazing and, if they weren't such nice guys, I'm sure they could have gone on to develop some sort of giant robots that would have enslaved us all to their eternal dominion. However, I digress. We'd been chatting about doing a game together, but we never seemed able to agree on an idea until Bizarre Wars (A *Star Wars* parody) came along. We did a fair bit of preliminary design work but, without a firm deal from a publisher, the game never really gathered any momentum, which is a pity as I think Level 9 technology and Delta 4 comedy would have been a pretty righteous combination."

The Big Sleaze was Delta 4's first departure from the fantasy genre, yet it proved even more successful that the earlier hits





› DISCUSS ABSTRACT CONCEPTS

Fergus says: "I'd always wanted to do serious stuff as well as comedy. In fact, I tried to find out about working on a Lord Of The Rings game long before I released Bored, but I wasn't speaking to the right people at that point. In any event, there were things I wanted to experiment with and the Mindfighter storyline (which my wife Anna had been writing when we first met) seemed an ideal setting. I wish I'd had the opportunity to continue with those titles, because we were really finding our feet with that first release. The work we were doing on the subsequent titles was really very exciting."

› HIT DELTA 4 WITH AXE

Fergus says: "A series of unfortunate events befell Delta 4. After The Big Sleaze, the plan was to do some work on the Abstract Concepts titles then go back to the humorous material with another Delta 4 title. However, Abstract Concepts was one of a number of affiliate labels that didn't survive the restructuring of Activision, our publisher. There were a few attempts to resurrect it all but the planets never quite aligned in that auspicious way."

› EXAMINE UNRELEASED GAMES

Fergus says: "There were essentially four unreleased projects, each taken to a different stage of development. The only one that was actually completed



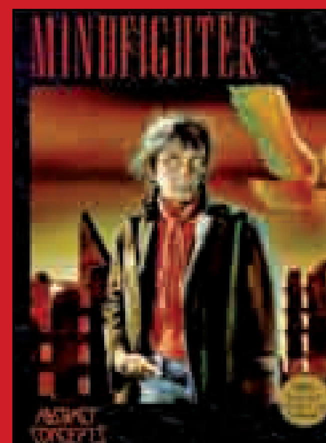
The first and only game released on the Abstract Concepts label came complete with a poster and 160-page scene-setting novel

was The Smirking Horror, a humorous look at *Psycho, A Nightmare On Elm Street, Friday the 13th, The Hitcher, House*, and all those other great 80s horror films. It was developed using SWAN, and it was really rather good fun. Prior to that, I'd obviously been designing Bizarre Wars, but that project never quite got off the ground.

"For Abstract Concepts, we had two further games planned. The first one, Parisian Knights, was a period piece about continental espionage, set between the two world wars. We actually showed a demo of this at a show and I remember that it had some really stunning visuals – all sketches and watercolours scanned in – but it was never completed. Lastly, there was Goodnight Cruel World, a futuristic conspiracy story that had a strong Philip K Dick vibe running through it."

›MAKE LORD OF THE RINGS

Fergus says: "I thought the chance of working on a Lord Of The Rings game had disappeared forever after Melbourne House released its version. However, years later, I discovered that the book rights might possibly be available. I went across to meet Tolkien Enterprises in Berkley and, over the period of some months we progressed the negotiations to a pretty advanced stage. Design work was well underway and we had developed technology to die for – a stunning graphic adventure system that



would have completely eclipsed later market-leading titles such as Blade Runner. Sadly, the company I was at didn't share my appetite for the project until after it became clear what a *huge* license it was and, by that time, the opportunity had gone."

› EXAMINE KINGDOM O' MAGIC

Following the death of Delta 4, Fergus joined On-Line Entertainment and worked on some of the very first CD-ROM titles for the PC and Amiga CDTV. In 1992, he set up the Southampton development studio for SCi, where he later developed Kingdom O' Magic, a graphic adventure that parodied the pillars of the fantasy genre. There was a definite sense of deja vu hanging in the air…

Fergus says: "Kingdom O' Magic was a Delta 4 title in everything but name. I love that game so much, and I still can't believe we got away with doing what we did in it! As always, there were plenty of things I'd have approached differently on the project, but it did have some truly sublime moments in it. You can't go wrong with John Sessions



Although not a Delta 4 game, Kingdom O' Magic is swathed in Fergus' trademark humour

›Delta 4 Softography

TITLE	YEAR	PUBLISHER	FORMAT
Sherwood Forest	1984	Delta 4	Spectrum
The Dragonstar Trilogy	1985	Delta 4	Spectrum
Galaxias	1985	Delta 4 Software	Spectrum
Quest for the Holy Joystick	1985	Delta 4	Spectrum
Return of the Holy Joystick	1985	Delta 4	Spectrum
Bored of the Rings	1985	Delta 4	Spectrum/C64/CPC/BBC
Robin of Sherlock	1985	Silversoft	Spectrum/CPC
The Boggit	1986	CRL	Spectrum/CPC
The Colour of Magic	1986	Piranha	Spectrum/C64/CPC
Murder Off Miami	1987	CRL	Spectrum/C64/CPC
The Big Sleaze	1987	Piranha	Spectrum/C64/CPC
Mindfighter	1988	Activision	Spectrum/C64/CPC/PCW/PC/Amiga/ST

doing the voice of your main character, Paul Darrow (Avon from *Blake's 7*) discussing a bizarre farmyard love-triangle, and an army of orcs who all sound like James Mason. SCi recently gave me permission to release the recording script which can be downloaded from **www.delta4.co.uk** if anyone feels so inclined."

› READ BOOK

Fergus' website is also the home of Star Drawers***, his new novel that's available for download in PDF format.***

Fergus says: "It's terribly annoying when you work on-and-off for years writing a novel and then, just when you knuckle down and finish it, two other similar ones come along and wreck your chances of being published… but yes, I've now completed *Star Drawers*. It's very much Delta 4 in style, being a parody of that original great sci-fi movie. The transition from interactive to traditional fiction was challenging but I'm pleased with the results. I've also got an amusing short story appearing in *The Chap Magazine* and, hopefully, these will be the first of several such forages into more traditional writing."

› CONTINUE ADVENTURE

Fergus says: "I really miss the traditional adventure genre of games, especially if you read 'interactive fiction' for 'adventure'. Interactive fiction is an art-form waiting to happen, it's just lost its way temporarily. As long as people read books, and find that deeper level of empathy and involvement that isn't possible in film, interactive fiction has immense potential. The challenge is to find a way of delivering and marketing it. I would love to be a part of making that happen."

› DISCUSS AI

Fergus says: "I do tend to rant on about AI and I think it's fair to say that it's all Level 9's fault. Mike and Pete Austin were showing me an upcoming version of A-Code and what it could do. One thing that really caught my imagination was the idea of character AI that could dynamically interpret high-level instructions (such as GET SWORD) into a series of lower level instructions about moving to where the sword was, using the keys in your pocket to unlock any locked doors along the way, and then getting the sword. Yes, it avoided all the tedious error messages – 'I can't go that way, the door is locked' – but more importantly it meant that characters could be given high-level goals which could dynamically guide their behaviour.

To my knowledge, nobody has taken this much further, which is rather a pity. Black & White had some fantastic neural-style AI but, aside from that, character intelligence doesn't seem to have evolved much since the 1980s – staggering when you think how other aspects of the medium have improved so dramatically."

› EXAMINE INDUSTRY

Fergus says: "There's cause for concern in today's games industry, but equally there's a lot to like across many different genres. I love action titles like Unreal Tournament 2004 and strategy stuff like Medieval Total War. However, the thing that encourages me most about the games industry is the recent Grand Theft Auto titles. I love the idea of a robust, convincing environment used as a backdrop to a non-linear game. We need more games like this, but unfortunately titles of this quality are few and far between.

"Clearly, there are too many games on the market at the moment, but I think the increasing cost of development reduce the number of titles produced. Hopefully the original, great ideas will still find their way through."

› REVIVE DELTA 4

Fergus says: "I don't know that Delta 4 could make a comeback now. However, I would like to do more interactive fiction, and the chances are that at least one project would involve a parody of something. I guess I'll just need to wait and see."

Following the release of Kingdom O' Magic and Carmageddon for SCi, Fergus joined Smoking Gun Productions were he now works on the Club Manager football titles.

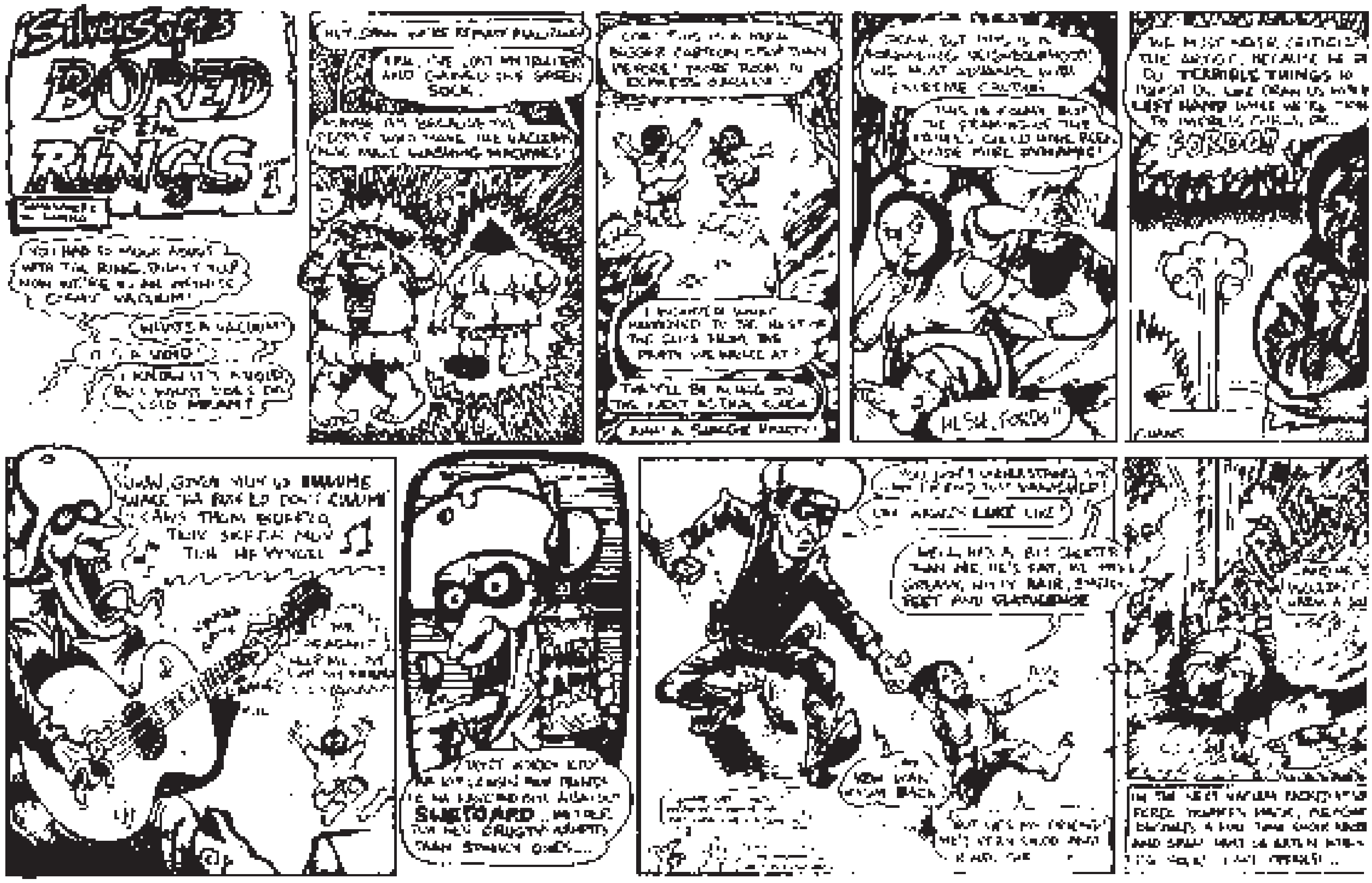
Fergus says: "By day I am a mild-mannered software developer, working on Club Manager, but football can be a cruel mistress, especially when you follow Partick Thistle and Southampton. I'm also involved with several side projects that will hopefully develop into something exciting over the coming months."

› DROP ALL EXCEPT FAVOURITE GAME

Fergus says: "Decisions, decisions! If I had to pick just one game at gunpoint, I'd choose two: The Boggit (which everybody apart from *Crash* magazine seemed to find funny) and The Big Sleaze (my first good review from *Crash* – perhaps I should have adopted a Chandler-esque style sooner!). However, if I thought you were actually going to shoot me, I'd crack and tell you that The Boggit was always my favourite."



For lots more Delta 4 information (plus the *Star Drawers* PDF novel), visit Fergus' website at www.delta4.co.uk


Silversoft's
BORED of the RINGS


SILVERSOFT'S
BORED of the RINGS
EPISODE TWO:
BORIS VALLEJO?!

Mobile Arcade

Retro gaming is undergoing something of a renaissance, what with plug-n-play joysticks being released almost monthly and an abundance of downloads available online. But what if you want to play games on the go and don't want the expense of the latest handhelds? Well, that mobile phone sitting in your pocket could be the answer, as David Crookes discovers



For many gaming fans, Jon Hare is a videogaming legend. In the 90s he was the man behind the beautiful game that was Sensible Soccer, and there's very little he doesn't know about programming games with an instant pick-up-and-play factor. But now this key industry figure is turning his attention away from producing games for computers and consoles, and is instead concentrating his efforts into mobile gaming. And, we're not talking Sony's PSP or Nintendo's DS here. For Mr Hare's Tower Studios, which he runs with John Phillips and Mike Montgomery from The Bitmap Brothers, is recreating some of the best known retro software for mobile phones.



Jon Hare (right, pictured at the recent Retrovision event) has resurrected the classic Sensible Soccer for mobile phones

The first offering from the Tower stable is, unsurprisingly, Sensible Soccer, and within a few months the 16-bit combat classic Cannon Fodder will follow. Both game are being published by Kuji Wireless, and these titles are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to producing games for phones. There are many more on the way...

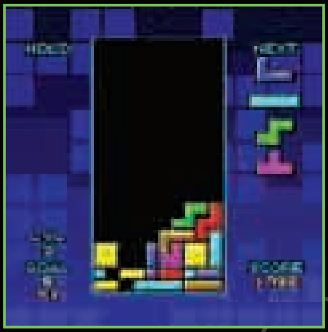
Talking business

Mobile phone gaming grew from very humble beginnings, with very simple games like Snake often built into early handsets. The industry has moved on in leaps and bounds since then, with more complex and innovative titles appearing. Retro gamers can now indulge in a quick blast of Prince of Persia anywhere they go, with all the great gameplay and graphics of the original classic. There are also great titles from Super Breakout and Worms to Manic Miner and Frogger available for the platform. Best of all, most of these titles are in the old school Spectrum and C64 budget price range of around £2.50 to £5.

This new found love of older games has sparked a sense of appreciation for older licences. Simon Dean, head of O2 Games, said: "Retro Games are extremely popular. Classics such as Sensible Soccer offer timeless fun and are enjoyed by everyone. They cross genres from action to puzzle and offer something to suit all tastes. By combining retro classics with a modern platform, such as the mobile phone, mobile gaming is opening up to a whole new audience and is reviving the nostalgia for old time favourites. But although the retro games available on O2 Active remain true to their originals, some have a modern twist. Sensible Soccer 3G features player celebrations, bookings, injuries and the original Sensible Soccer 'Hero' music video and crowd sound effects. It brings these great games into the 21st Century and makes them even more appealing to the modern consumer."

Despite this, mobile gaming is currently just a small part of the £7.9 billion PC and console game business, worth about £1 billion across the globe. However, indications suggest it is set for huge growth this year.

In terms of the mobile phone







Tetris, Pac-Man and Pitfall – just some of the classic retro games that are proving popular on mobile handsets

industry, gaming is seen as a key driving force to help grow new revenues. Acording to Nikesh Patel, a games analyst at Strategic Analytics, retro games are one of the key ingredients for future mobile videogaming success: "Retro games are simple to play, people know how to play them and there is familiarity. Early downloadable mobile games were quite complex and over elaborate, and many publishers in the industry have now realised that simplicity is key. Games like Tetris and Space Invaders seem to do well."

Patel forecasts that the market for downloadable games will be worth around £4 billion worldwide by 2009 and that the UK will be at the forefront. "The UK is an important market for mobile phone games because, on average, UK users spend higher levels on the same content then their European counterparts. The UK market is also relatively data savvy, with high levels of text usage."

Britsoft

For retro gamers, this means quite a lot. For a start, heavy British involvement means many retro UK titles look likely to be converted to mobile phones on a regular basis. And this has already begun with the aforementioned deal to bring Sensible Soccer and Cannon Fodder to Java enabled mobile-phones. Kevin Holloway, managing director of Kuju Wireless, said: "Sensible Software was highly regarded for creating supremely playable and inventive games. It was the game developer equivalent of The Beatles in the 16-bit era. Like great music, great gameplay never goes out of fashion." Pramesh Chauhan, business development manager at Kuju, continued: "Both Sensible Soccer and Cannon Fodder are real classics. In particular, Sensible Soccer completely revolutionised football games when it was first released on the Amiga and Atari ST. We're convinced it will do the same on mobile phones."

And more good news – further games from the Sensible/Bitmap stable could be on their way. Jon Hare said: "The deal we have signed with Kuju gives us the unique opportunity to re-vamp some of our classic old games for a younger audience and let our creative juices flow. After all these years we are still as ambitious and passionate as ever."

Perfect fit

Retro games are perfect for mobile phones and there are two main reasons for this. A lot of old games were devised to be instantly playable – and to be just as quickly put away. For gaming on the go, when a Sensible Soccer session could easily be interrupted by an important phone call, such an approach to games is a major plus. And secondly, when you look down the list of available games from some of the leading mobile content providers, it's retro properties that jump out at you. This isn't mere speculation either. The ELSPA Chart for January 2005 had Tetris, Pac-Man and Pitfall in the top 10. The rest of the chart had some other recognisable names such as Colin McRae Rally, Connect 4 and Monopoly, proving that not only are people going for concepts that are instantly apparent, but are also heading for recognisable brands.

Ben Taylor, who specialises in content provision for Vodafone, said: "Retro games come into their own on mobiles because of brand recognition. When we launched Vodafone Live two years ago, we did so with 30 games, the majority of which were retro releases like Galaxian, and we did that because people knew them. It's the same with Tomb Raider and Worms – two games which are popular on mobiles because they are great, and people are aware of them. It's certainly the case that retro games are hugely popular. They are great to play on mobile phones mainly because they're easy to pick up and difficult to master.

Arcade legends

Namco and Atari were among the first to wake up to mobile retro gaming. Two years ago, Motorola and iFone struck a deal to provide consumers with a number of original Atari games popular in the late 70s and early 80s. Atari's all-time greats including Pong, Centipede, Breakout and Asteroids were ported over to mobiles following a year of negotiations during which Manchester-based iFone secured



›Palm & Pocket PC

Retro gaming on the go is not exclusive to mobile phones. The PlayStation Portable and Nintendo DS may well be on the verge of wrapping up the handheld market, but for those who have a Palm-operated PDA or a Pocket PC to hand, there are a wealth of retro gaming options available. And, of course, they're a damn sight more interesting than using the PDA for storing telephone numbers and scheduling meetings.

For a start, Rick Dangerous has made an appearance on Palm in a great port. Rick was the Indiana Jones of computer games well before Lara Croft came on the scene, and this latest incarnation has him once again being chased by boulders and trying to avoid traps. You can find it at www.freewarepalm.com/games/rickdangerous.shtml.



Atari games are also well represented. Users of both Palm and Pocket PCs can download versions of Asteroids, Breakout, Centipede, Missile Command and Pong from www.handango.com. And, Namco has ported Pac-Man, Ms. Pac-Man, Galaxian and Mappy over to Palm. They're available from www.palm.namcogames.com.

Aside from ports and remakes, you can also emulate the machines of days gone by. Emulators are available for the Atari 2600 (PocketVCS), NES (PocketNES),Commodore 64 (PocketC64) and Spectrum (Pocketclive). Pocketgamer (www.pocketgamer.org/games/emulators/index.shtml) is a good place to start looking.



Compatibility is a pressing issue, with games like Pac-Man having to be designed for many different devices

a deal with Infogrames, owners of the Atari name.

It was felt that 20- to 30-somethings who remembered the games from the times they were on Atari's original coin-op machines would be attracted.

As the big guns continue to sit up and take notice, ELSPA launched its mobile gaming charts last April. It is based upon the sales figures for Java downloads, supplied initially by the four key mobile operators – O2, Orange, T-Mobile and Vodafone. It is estimated that they currently command approximately 80% of the mobile games download market.

Michael Rawlinson, deputy director general of ELSPA, commented: "The mobile games chart is a natural extension of ELSPA's existing chart range. We are pleased to recognise mobile gaming as an established and ever-growing sector of the games industry, and are confident the chart will prove beneficial for both the industry and consumers alike."

Disengage

The mobile gaming market may be booming, but there is currently a problem with compatibility – not all games play on all phones and the manufacturers, operators and game publishers are working hard to find an industry standard. It's becoming much more of an issue since experts say there are actually more mobile gamers than console owners.

Vodafone's Ben Taylor said: "The industry is working on standardising a gaming platform. It obviously takes the good will of manufacturers and game producers but we're confident it will happen."

The introduction of 3G phones will move retro gaming to a new level this year. Namco's Ridge Racer is being launched by Vodafone later this year. It promises to be a faithful replication of the original arcade racer, albeit with only one car to race against and a reduction in polygons. It paves the way for a phone version of Tekken, although for the time being, Namco has been building on its Pac-Man franchise with offerings such as Pac-Man Pinball and Pac-Man Bowling.

Ben Taylor concluded: "Games are now second only to ring tones for mobile game content. And we're seeing the take-up of the 3G service which promises better 3D graphics and the capacity for more levels. Retro games will benefit from this. Most of them are rewritten from scratch and I think we'll see 3D mobile versions of games like Dizzy in the future."

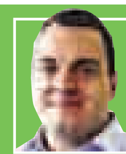
Whatever the prediction though, it all adds up to one thing: The future's certainly bright... the future's retro.



Nokia's N-Gage may not have set the world on fire, but a bigger and better version 2.0 is on its way

›The hard cell

Kuju Wireless is one of the leading mobile phone software houses specialising in old skool titles for mobile phones. Retro Gamer spoke with managing director Kevin Holloway, fresh from his trip to Cannes for the 3GSM World Congress, a mobile trade fair.



Retro Gamer: How was 3GSM?

Kevin Holloway: Great thanks! Sensible Soccer was very well received, even in a hall half filled with porn!

RG: Kuju appears to be something of a specialist in retro gaming for mobiles. Why is that?

KH: Well, retro games are very popular especially if the name is still well known, which is why games such as Sensible Soccer generate so much excitement. I am constantly on the lookout for brand opportunities, including retro games. One advantage I have is that I've been in games for more than 20 years so I know a lot of people in the industry.

RG: One of the results of that search has been a deal with Tower Studios, which includes people who became well-known for making quality games for the Amiga, including Sensible Soccer and Cannon Fodder. Are any more Amiga-inspired games due?

KH: I don't think the Amiga in particular is being targeted as a source – but hey, there were some great games for it. I think the era that the Amiga belongs to in general is a great source of inspiration. Mind you, that might just be old age – nostalgia talking...

RG: Is mobile gaming a lucrative business?

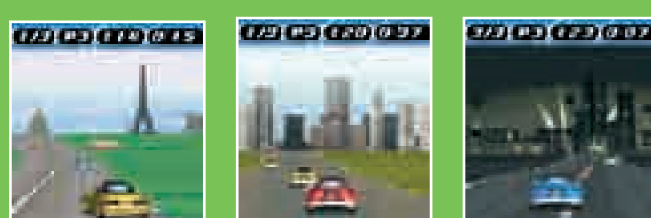
KH: For network operators it's still a small, but growing, revenue generator. But there are plenty of portals in Europe whose main line of business is selling content.

RG: What have been the most popular games for you so far?

KH: They would have to be Lotus Challenge: City Racing and Sensible Soccer. I got loads of emails asking for release dates when we announced the Sensible Soccer and Cannon Fodder deal. We also get a few emails with feedback on the games, but as we don't sell directly most feedback goes to our channel partners and gets summarised back to us...

RG: So will you be going through the back catalogues to churn out any old games you can get your hands on?

KH: Not at all. Kuju will continue to push quality over quantity. I think the emphasis on brand recognition will continue, but I hope the average quality of games will improve as brand owners learn who the quality publishers are. Mobile games have a much larger and wider potential target audience than consoles – after all who do you know that doesn't own a mobile? Community or multiplayer gaming will probably prevail as connectivity is an integral part of the technology.



Another name from the past... Kuju's Lotus Challenge is one of its most popular downloads

Mobile reviews

There are 100s of retro game ports available for mobile phones. As a taster, here are four that are worthy of both your time and money

Prince Of Persia

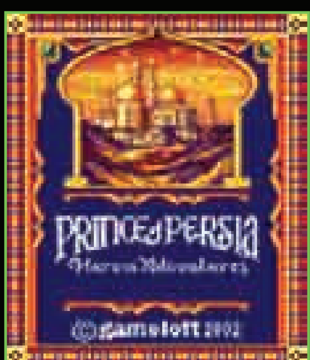
Gameloft

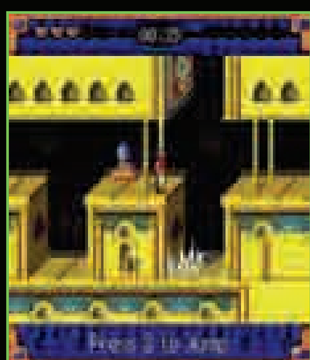
The original game, which was ported to pretty much every gaming platform under the sun, always looked a dream and played like it too.

The only real difference between the original game and the mobile version is the story, which has changed ever so slightly. In the original, the Sultan had nipped off to fight for his country, only for the Grand Vizier to decide to proclaim himself ruler. The Vizier then decided he wanted to marry the Sultan's daughter – only you, as the Prince, actually kinda liked her yourself. For your lusty thoughts you get chucked in prison and have one hour to agree to the marriage. The best response? To escape and rescue the Princess from her future husband. The mobile phone version sees the Vizier on a kidnap spree again, only this time targeting the Sultan's three wives. To stay in the good books of your ruler, you've must rescue them all.

But what about the game itself? Well, it's the usual arcade-action-adventure, with dozens of platforms and ladders and lots of swordplay. The palace is riddled with booby traps to stop you in your quest and the puzzle element will keep you playing this to the end. The action comes thick and fast, and the game loses absolutely nothing on the mobile (except for a slightly fiddly control method). If anything, the graphics are better than the original game.

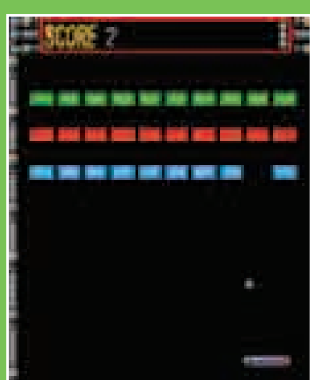
Rating:





Breakout

iFone



We have a bat, a ball and a load of bricks – combine them and you've got one of the simplest and earliest games. Breakout has been copied, converted and ripped off a million or more times, but it's still frighteningly addictive.

The aim of the game needs little explanation – demolish rows of bricks using the bouncing ball, ensuring it stays on screen by moving the paddle left and right. The points rack up by destroying bricks in the shortest time possible, the nerves notch up a gear when a second ball is released, and the sense of relief is apparent when you don't drop a single ball and are rewarded with an extra life. Graphics are basic as you'd expect, but it's a pretty faithful conversion and certainly worth a shot.

Rating:

Sensible Soccer

Tower Studios

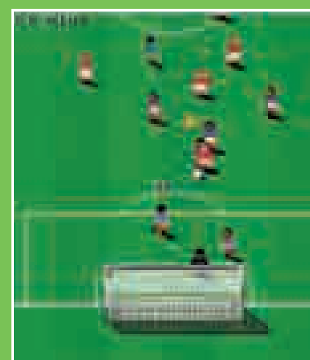
Sensible Soccer was without doubt the most refreshing and playable representation of our national sport when it was released more than a decade ago. If there was ever a game which proved that gameplay was far more important than graphics then this was it. With its top-down view and instinctive control system, it became an instant classic on 16-bit systems. And the good news is that Sensi translates well to mobile phones, retaining the simple controls and great gameplay which made the original an essential app.

It's something of a cut-down version however. The mobile game gives you the option of playing a one-off friendly, a cup tournament or a series of league games, picking one of 50 football teams – far less than the 16-bit original. And the tiny players so beloved of Sensi are even smaller. But both were to be expected. What is more surprising is the fact that the team you pick does not appear to have a bearing on the side's performance on the pitch. The computer opponents often have simple-to-spot movement patterns too.

Bad points aside, the beautiful game itself is lovingly reproduced. Running at angles is as easy as running up and down and from left to right. Passing is fluid and the difficulty level in scoring is just right. There's also the ability to pick up where you left off if you need to use the phone for something else. A worthy purchase.

Rating:





Pac-Man

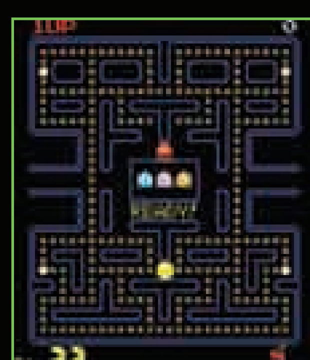
Namco

The yellow, circular superstar had his first glorious outing in 1980. And in doing so, Pac-Man really brought videogaming to the masses with an identifiable, strong character who went on to star in numerous sequels, spin-offs, remakes, and even a board game. Gamers were completely addicted to the coin-op and it was surely one of the reasons why the Namco arcade stick sold so well recently. It was also one of the first games made available on mobiles and it rides high in the top 10 to this day.

Chances are you've already downloaded this game but if not, you won't be disappointed. Everything you loved about the coin-op is faithfully recreated in small form and you can even snap up the sequels, including Ms. Pac-Man. It's the perfect game for mobiles – simple to control and an absolute joy to play.

Rating:





Next Level Gaming: COMMODORE 128



The C64 was one of the most popular gaming platforms of all time, with 1,000s of games available over its long and distinguished life. But how did its bigger brother fare on the gaming front? Andrew Fisher looks at the games available for the Commodore 128



Launched in 1985, the Commodore 128 had a split personality. Inside were two different processors – a MOS 8502 and a Zilog Z80A. The 8502 gave it the power to be two different machines – the all-new Commodore 128 and the classic Commodore 64. The native C128 mode introduced 128Kb of memory (expandable to a staggering 640Kb), enhanced BASIC 7.0 and 80-column RGB output. C64 mode, meanwhile, was compatible with the vast majority of original C64 software and hardware, and could be easily accessed by typing 'GO64' (or holding down the Commodore key and pressing the Reset button). Finally, the Z80A processor was fully compatible with CP/M 3.0, opening up access to a huge library of business software.

But who the hell wanted business software when the C128 ran twice as fast as the C64, had double the amount of memory (including additional Video RAM which could also be used as temporary memory), and featured extra graphic modes? Surely there was potential there for some serious gaming action…

Prepare for launch

The C128 launched in the UK at £269, while another £179 would buy you the new 1571 disk drive. This was a double-sided drive, giving up to 330Kb on a 5.25in floppy disk. The drive could read the Commodore GCR (Group Cycle Recording) format and the MFM (Modified Frequency Modulation) format used by CP/M. With the right commands it could use 'burst' mode, which was designed to load and save data faster.

There were plenty of games available for the machine, but this was mainly because it was backwards compatible with the C64. If you picked up many game titles you would see them labelled as being for the Commodore 64/128. In other words, the software ran in C64 mode only. Over 95% of C64 games were compatible with the new machine, but there was only a small number of commercial games that were 128-only.

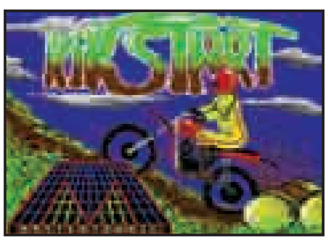


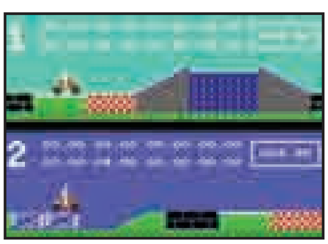


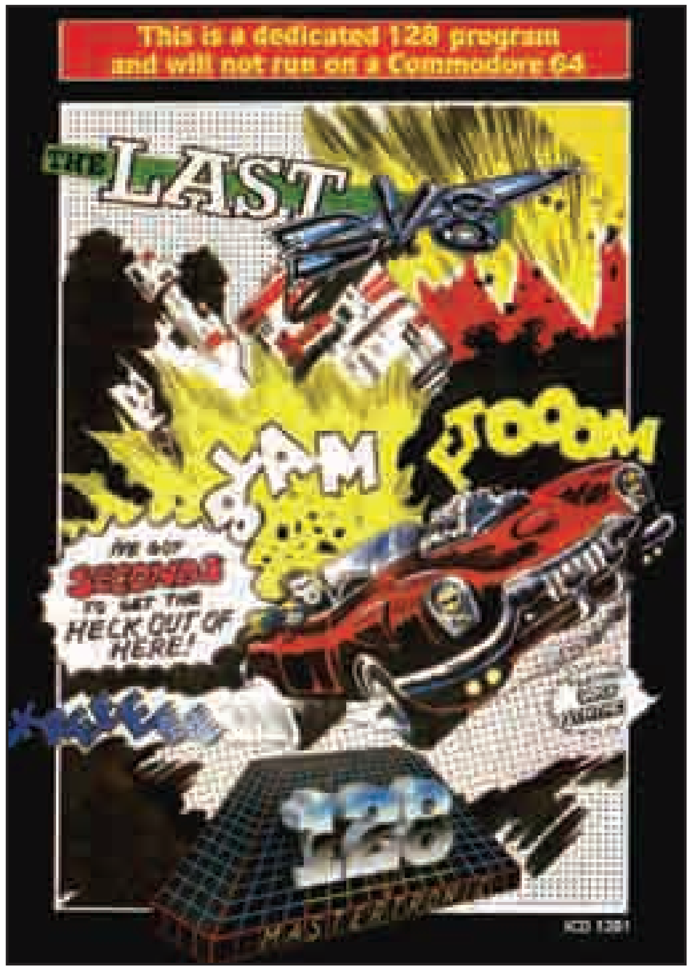
As with the Spectrum 128, one of the first companies to pledge support to the new machine was budget label Mastertronic, which released enhanced versions of The Last V8 and Kikstart. Both were available on disk format for £4.99.

The C128 version of The Last V8 added an additional level at the start of the game and featured different sound samples. On the extra preliminary level you had to collect fuel rods dotted around the screen, before tackling the main mission and driving back to your base. Additions aside, the awful control method from the C64 original was not tweaked, meaning that Rob Hubbard's great soundtrack remained the only thing worth recommending.

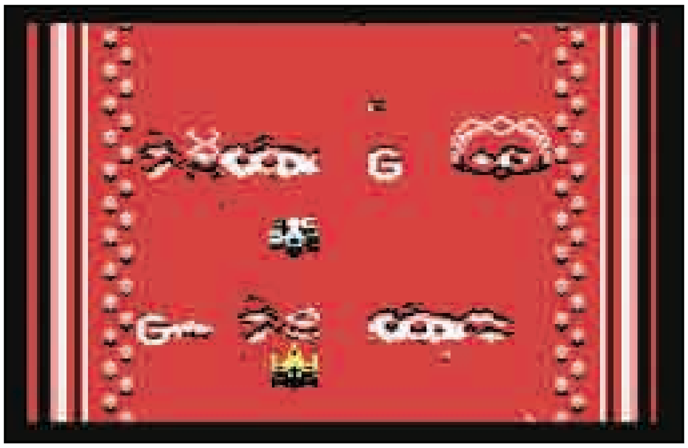
Shaun Southern's enhanced version of Kikstart was a much better effort, with new courses and obstacles. Three practice tracks were initially loaded into memory, and three sets of eight tracks were on the disk – giving a











total of 27 different courses, compared to the original's rather meagre eight. The new version also included smoother scrolling, more variety in the course hazards, and a table which recorded your best track times.

Overall, the C128 version (confusingly titled Kikstart 2, and not to be confused with the true sequel that later appeared on the C64) is better than the original budget classic. But if you were a proud C128 owner, new tracks and a few tweaks weren't going to impress your mocking mates. What was needed was a C128 game that was a clear cut above the C64 original.

Shock horror!

In one of the most bizarre licensing deals ever, CRL released a game based on Richard O'Brien's The Rocky Horror Picture Show in 1985. Separate versions were released for the C64 and the C128, with the former seemingly ported straight from the dodgy Spectrum version. The



Although not advertised on the packaging, Alleykat (top) and Morpheus from Graftgold benefited from the extra power of the C128

C128 version, however, featured completely reworked graphics with more detailed characters and more colourful backgrounds. There were even a couple of new locations – one outside the mansion and the other down in the dungeon. The zany gameplay was pretty much the same however, with you trying to rescue your other half while avoiding a mutant, motorbike-riding Meatloaf, among other bizarre hazards.

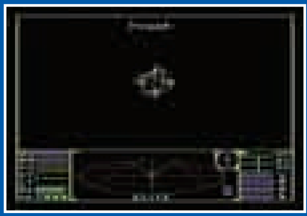
CRL also released C64 and C128 versions of Stratton, a massive maze game with some nicely drawn graphics. On the C128 the playing area was larger with more variety in the graphics, and the difficulty level was slightly easier. It was still rather repetitive though.

A C128 version of Anco's Thai Boxing was also available, a game best remembered for the players' faces which gradually became more bloodied and

›Elite 128

One of the best-known games of all time has been ported (unofficially) to the C128. Elite 128 by Ullrich von Bassewitz is an unofficial version that actually runs on the C128 in C64 mode, but with smoother graphics. This is thanks to a clever technique called vertical blanking which unlocks the speed of the faster processor. On the C64, you can shut off the screen to gain processor speed. By timing when the raster (which draws the screen) is in the upper or lower border and blanking the screen briefly, the processor speeds up and faster calculations can be done without disturbing the actual display area. On a standard C64, the speed increase is minimal, but on the C128 in C64 mode, the speed is ramped up by





For more information on Elite 128, visit **www.gb64.com/oldsite/gameofweek/elite/Elite128.txt**

about 40%! The author has also added SuperCPU support, and is planning to introduce new gameplay features, including bounty hunting side missions and a new 'hidden' galaxy to explore.

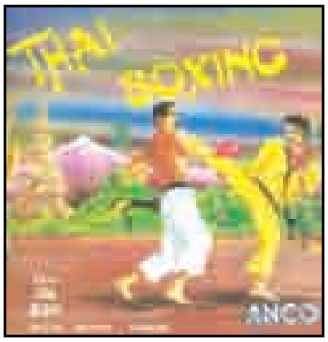
The driving game Test Drive II also uses vertical blanking to display its filled 3D graphics, so again this receives a speed boost when run on the C128. In a similar style, the flight simulation games Stealth Mission (by Sublogic) and Project Stealth Fighter (by Microprose) feature improved graphic speed and smoothness when run on the C128. Commodore Disk User magazine even published a patch for Flight Simulator II from Sublogic, which was written *before* the C128 was available. The patch allows you to switch between normal and fast mode, which gives an increase of between 20% and 25% in the frame rate.





Spot the difference. That's the C64 version of Rocky Horror on the left, and the much better-looking C128 update on the right





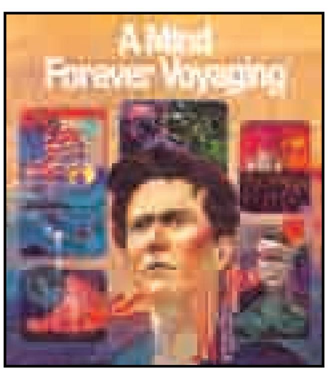
Thai Boxing was available for the C128, but the changes were minimal

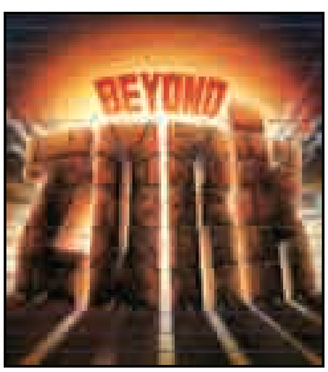
bruised as the fight progressed. Aside from the addition of animated spectators, however, the C128 version brought nothing new to the battle.

Some C64 games were actually enhanced when running on a C128, thanks to the faster 8502 processor. The classic racing/shooting game Alleykat by Andrew Braybrook had more bullets onscreen, and more 'segments' to the deadly Katerkillar enemy. One of Andrew's later games, Morpheus, also used the extra processor speed to generate more enemies.

Another commercial game worthy of note is Ultima V: Warriors of Destiny, released by Origin in 1988. The enhanced C128 game featured atmospheric music during play, a feature that was sorely lacking from the standard C64 version. In addition, thanks to the larger RAM, more data could be stored in memory, reducing the frequency of disk loading (which was quicker anyway, thanks to the speedy 1571 drive working in burst mode).

The hardware capabilities of the machine leant themselves well to interactive fiction, or text adventures as they were known back in the 1980s. Infocom released several titles exclusively for the C128 as part of its Interactive Fiction Plus range (adventures designed for machines with at least 128Kb of RAM and an 80-column display.) The titles included A Mind Forever Voyaging, Trinity, Bureaucracy and Beyond Zork. All were text only affairs except Beyond Zork, which introduced a colour display and basic on-screen map. Uniquely, the compass directions were mapped onto the machine's numeric keypad, making navigation quicker and easier. You could also map common commands to the function keys.





Infocom released dozens of adventures for the C64, but a small handful would only run on the C128

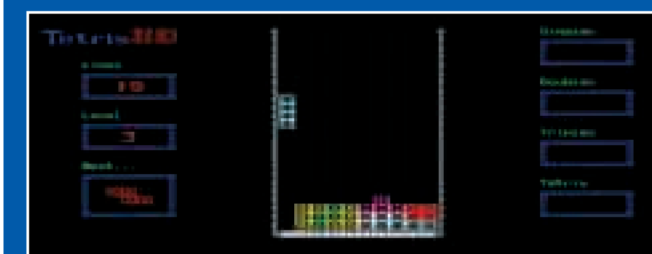
›Homebrewing

Commercial games may have been thin on the ground, but the C128 was home to a lot of homebrew titles, many of them versions of card or board games. The bulletin board systems in America – CompuServe, Genie and QuantumLink (forerunner of AOL) – carried many good games.

Tetris128 Chris Batchelor is a shareware version of the classic puzzle game that runs in 80-column mode. You can choose the game speed and number of lines required to get to the next level, as well as the width of the 'well' that the pieces fall into. A lack of speed and in-game music let it down.

Other titles of interest include Ultimate Risk, a one-player, 80-column version of the board game that has decent artificial intelligence. Airport128 gives you the chance to be an air traffic controller, dealing with bad weather and up to 20 planes trying to land or take-off, while Solitaire128 has some nicely drawn cards in 80-column mode and mouse control.

The UK magazine Commodore Disk User also published Commodore 128 games. One clever title was War at Sea, a unique version of Battleships by Paul Traynor. This required two screens – one 40-column (or television screen) and one 80-column, to give the two players their own view of the action.



This homebrew version of Tetris made good use of the C128's 80-column display

End of the line

So that was pretty much it on the C128 gaming front. Not that it really mattered, as the C128's future as any kind of viable platform was looking shaky. Less than six months after the launch, along came the Amiga 1000 and the C128 looked seriously under-powered.

Nonetheless, the hardware was re-launched twice. First came the C128D (the D standing for Desktop), with a built-in disk drive, metal case and separate keyboard. This was followed by the C128DCR, a cost-reduced model which replaced the metal case with a cheaper, plastic alternative. Both of these PC-style models quadrupled the internal Video RAM from 16Kb to 64Kb, allowing for higher-resolution graphics, but no games took advantage of this fact.

There was plenty of serious application software available for the C128 – including a popular version of GEOS (a graphical operating system based on the Macintosh interface) – but as a games platform it never made a real breakthrough. It could be argued that the C128 was never intended as a games machine, but the same could be said about the C64, which was initially ushered in as a serious alternative to the VIC-20. It's probably wiser to say that when it came to games, the C128 was stuck in a supply and demand rut, with the lack of dedicated titles failing to attract the legions of C64 owners, which in turn led to a lack of future game development.

<Abandonware: Gone but not Forgotten...

What happens to old games when they die? Aaron Birch delves into the world of abandonware – a world full of classic gaming history, and a world also full of legal controversy. Is abandonware legal? Or is firing up that downloaded copy of Wing Commander more likely to send to straight to jail without passing go? We find out, once and for all...



Remember that classic shooter you played as a youngster? Back then it was state of the art, and although technology has advanced rapidly over time, far surpassing that crusty old title, you'll never forget how good it was, and you'd give anything to play it one more time. Sadly though, the game is no longer for sale, and the owners of the title are long gone, succumbing to bankruptcy or a corporate buyout many moons ago. So what's the solution? Well, you could search charity shops, car boot sales or eBay for that elusive title. Or you could download it for free from an abandonware website…

Abandonware is a term that many people will find familiar, but it's also a term that most don't fully understand, not knowing exactly what it is, or indeed, if it's entirely above board. Is it safe to download these games? Are you breaking the law? Will the local constabulary bust down your door? With so many questions, and no real straight answers, we decided to find out from the people in the know. But first, what exactly is abandonware?

Lost and found

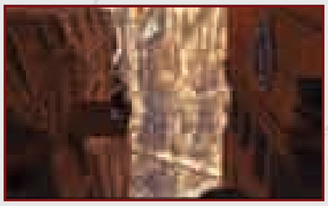
The actual term abandonware is obviously coined from abandoned software, but sadly, its meaning isn't so clear cut. Depending on where you look on the Internet, you'll find all sorts of differing descriptions. The most popular description of abandonware is software that has long been forgotten by the original creator, or a game that has been left in retail limbo due to the closure of a company. Because of this, titles are left unsupported and can no longer be tracked down in shops or online to buy, such is the bad state of play. Over time, many keen gamers have grown tired of this situation and made the games in question freely available via the wonderful worldwide Web. These games (which are mostly classic DOS titles, although many other formats do surface), are then snapped up by online gaming fans through a huge number of abandonware websites.

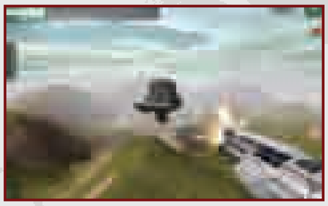
The first abandonware sites appeared online around 1996-7 and quickly spawned a massive collection of online archives, many offering general downloads, and others specialising in specific genres or titles. Finally, gamers looking for old classics could get hold of the once unobtainable gems and play them again. Applications like DOSBox and SloMo became essential tools for getting retro games working on new PCs, and all the time, more and more titles appeared online, making for a treasure trove of gaming history.

But, although abandonware remained largely unknown for a while, meaning that the distribution of the classic titles was untouched and unnoticed, it wasn't long before the 'warez' scene encroached on abandonware, and things changed. Many so-called abandonware sites began to offer increasingly more dubious downloads, and it wasn't long before the unwritten rules of only hosting games that were no longer supported or sold went out of the window. Now sites started to offer commercially available titles, and games that were still actively supported by the original IP (Intellectual Property) holder were available illegally. Soon the lines between abandonware and warez were blurred to such a degree that it was inevitable the authorities would step in – and that's exactly what happened.

Many abandonware sites were instantly closed down, and many others were forced to change their approach. The whole abandonware area became a legal minefield, and websites began to rethink their strategy for distributing old games. Many sites stopped hosting a large range of titles, and others even began to post links to official online resellers of games, giving people the chance to buy them once more.







Several commercial games have been made freely available to the public by their copyright holders. These include Rockstar's Grand Theft Auto (top), Revolution's Beneath a Steel Sky and Sierra's Tribes

Taking sides

The argument still rages on about abandonware, and both sides strongly enforce their own views. Those who support abandonware claim that distributing these old games is not illegal or an assault on the original copyright holders, but is instead a much needed service to the gaming public – a service which the IP owner isn't willing to provide. Due to the low profit margins involved, most companies discontinue support for old titles, leaving fans alone in the dark, so to speak. If their original copy dies, they have no chance of a replacement, and as such, can no longer play their favourite classics. Abandonware gives people the chance to grab hold of these titles again, and there's really no harm in it.

On the flipside, many software publishers don't want their property distributed freely. And, with the recent resurgence in commercial retro releases, this is even more important to many companies, who are more likely than ever to raid their back catalogues for titles to re-release on newer platforms such as the GameBoy Advance. Then there's those plug 'n' play consoles of course, and PC/console retro

›Elitism

One of the more famous arguments over freely available classic titles doesn't actually involve the general public, but instead the developers themselves. The ever popular space trading sim Elite can be freely downloaded from the Web, but this wasn't always to the liking of one of its co-creators. Ian Bell and David Braben have been at odds for some time now regarding royalty disputes over the third game in the series, Frontier: First Encounters. This sparked a bit of a ruckus that kicked off royally in 1999. Lawsuits were filled, press releases from both parties were issued and the whole thing was made very public indeed. More specifically, while Ian Bell deemed that Elite should be made freely available for anyone's use (it can be found on his website http://www.iancgbell.clara.net/elite), Braben disputed this, and originally insisted that it must not be made available for nothing. Bell's website was even closed down following legal action. The situation later eased a little and Bell's website was restored. Braben also released a public statement saying he had no problems with the game being made available, although he points out that the Elite IP still belongs to Bell and himself.



Elite creators, David Braben (left) and Ian Bell

compilations, digital TV games, mobile phone games. The list goes on and on.

What the future has in store for abandonware is not entirely clear. Although many companies do actively launch attacks on sites offering its property for download, it's still a fairly rare occurrence. Most companies simply don't want to spend the time and effort in digging up the dirt for a handful of old titles that aren't making money anyway, and some companies have even granted their own titles abandonware status. But one thing is certain, abandonware will not go away without a fight, and like warez and MP3 file sharing, it's going to be around for a long time to come.

›Find the source

Another element that can add confusion to the abandonware debate is Open Source software or source code. Open Source software is basically software that has been released and freely distributed for other people to use and develop. Perhaps the most famous Open Source software is Linux, which is a full operating system that has been worked on by masses of people, and has spawned numerous versions.

In abandonware terms, open source is a little different. For example, id Software released the source code for Doom and Quake, and people can freely developer their own games, ports or updates using it. However, you cannot re-distribute any of the original game files, so you must develop your own content and assets, or ask the end users to buy the original versions. The source code is literally the lines of code that go into making the game, and nothing more.





id Software has publicly released the source code for several of its first-person shooters

›ELSPA interview



ELSPA (Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association) was founded in 1989 and immediately acted as a voice for the UK computer games industry. From a starting membership of 12 companies, ELSPA now represents almost 100 different clients, including all of the major software publishers in the UK. As well as promoting its members, and making sure they are well known in the industry, ELSPA is a key player in enforcing anti-piracy laws and resolving copyright disputes. We spoke to John Hillier, a representative of ELSPA and manager of the association's 'Anti-Piracy Unit', about the thorny issue of abandonware.

Retro Gamer: Many different definitions of abandonware are often bandied about. What is ELSPA's official description?

John Hillier: ELSPA defines abandonware as software which is still available, but on which further support and development has been deliberately discontinued.

RG: Is it true that games can be classed as abandonware when they reach a certain age?

JH: No, as some companies may wish to release 'old' games at a later date, although some may wish to release previous editions of games as a marketing ploy, but only for personal use. Other than the 50-year limit on copyright, the age of a game is not an issue.

RG: It's also often perceived that a game can be freely distributed once the owner of the property goes out of business or ceases trading. Again, is this true?

JH: In order for any software to be freely distributed, the permission of the copyright holder must be acquired, regardless of the age of the product or the status of the original IP owner. Often when a company ceases trading, the rights to the intellectual property are sold on. The copyright within any software is still maintained by the IP owner, regardless of their status, and therefore a game can never be free unless the copyright owner clearly states that this is the case. In the majority of cases, someone, somewhere usually owns the copyright, whether or not they do anything with it.

RG: What is the current penalty for making illegal abandonware available for others to download?

JH: If the software is made available for free, then it is classed as a civil tort in the eyes of the law. This would be a matter for the individual IP owners to take action on, rather than ELSPA as a trade association. If the illegal software is being sold, then ELSPA is involved as the trader is committing a criminal offence under the Trade Marks Act 1994 and the Copyright, Designs & Patents Act 1988, both of which carry a maximum sentence of 10 years imprisonment and unlimited fine.

Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association

RG: Is there any form of penalty for people downloading and using abandonware for their own use?

JH: Again, this is a civil matter. It would be up to the IP holders to enforce any civil action as they see fit.

RG: There are many abandonware websites that claim to be legitimate, abiding by the law. But is there really such a thing?

JH: If the copyright holder has given permission for their software to be made freely available, then yes. However, such circumstances must be backed up by written approval from all the relevant copyright holders. It is doubtful that the sites involved would be able to substantiate this in respect of all games offered.

RG: Does ELSPA actively police abandonware?

JH: ELSPA reacts to any infringement of ELSPA members IP rights. ELSPA treats any sale of pirated goods very seriously, and if a trader is selling such software (regardless of game status) he is committing a criminal offence, and will be investigated accordingly.

RG: The bottom line. Should people avoid abandonware?

JH: Consumers should not download so called abandonware unless they can be absolutely certain that the relevant copyright holders have given their express permission for such downloads to take place. »»»

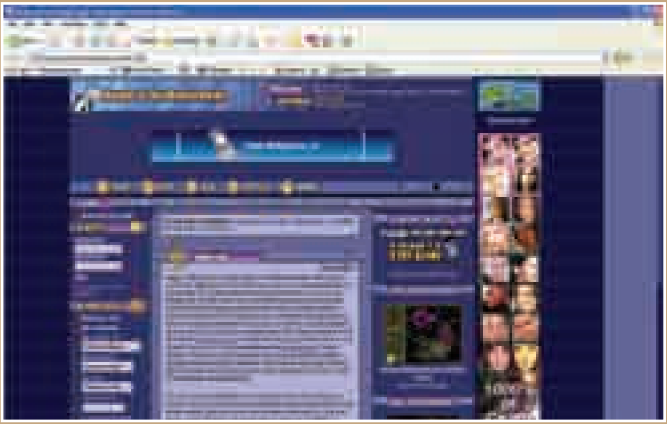
Abandonware sites

Here are just a few abandonware sites for you to peruse. Of course, you download files at your own risk...

Home of the Underdogs

www.the-underdogs.org

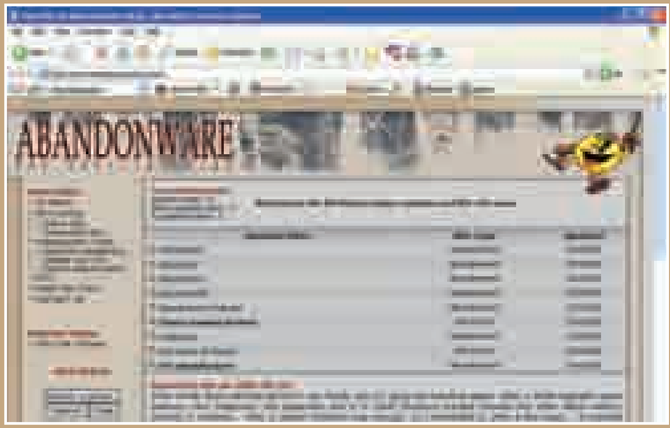
Considered by many to be the single greatest resource for abandonware, the long-running Underdogs site has perhaps the largest collection of abandonware titles on the Net. But, there's much more to the site than just games. There are also reviews, manuals, music rips, developer histories, and even an online store where small companies can sell their own games.



The Abandonware Ring

www.abandonwarering.com

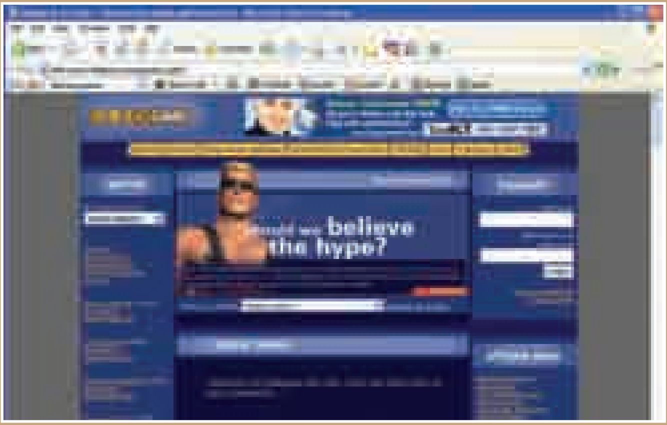
If you're not sure what game you're looking for, or want to find some new abandonware sites, then this is where you'll want to be. The Abandonware Ring is home to a long list of abandonware sites. Each site is rated, plus there's information on how many titles it has, and what types of game they are (such as RPG, action and so on).



BH Legend

www.bhlegend.com

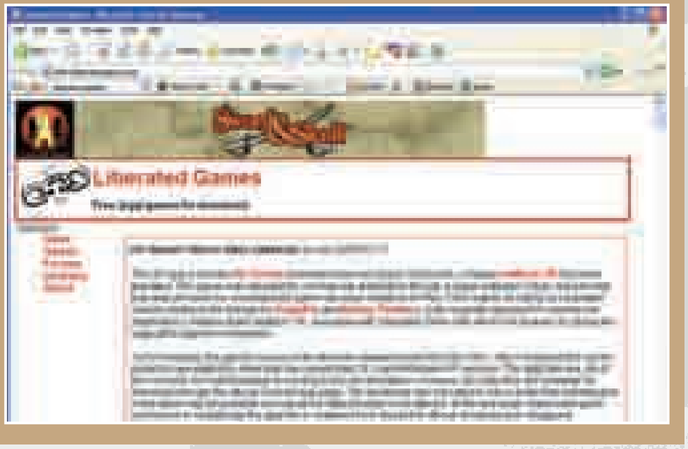
BH Legend is another popular abandonware site that contains a large collection of games for download. It also covers a range of formats, including PC, Amiga, Commodore 64 and Spectrum. Each game is accompanied by a review and several screenshots, and there's also pointers on how to run some titles using emulators.



Liberated Games

http://liberatedgames.org

Although the legality of many abandonware games may be disputed, this site hosts only games that have been officially released to the public by their IP holders. You'll find full versions of games for download, as well as source code releases. There's also a licence area that contains all of the applicable legal information, and a useful forum for community members.



›Abandonware top 10

We've had a good old root through the reams of abandonware sites in order to find the most sought-after downloads. So, in no particular order...

Elite



It had to be in the top 10 really, didn't it? It's no surprise to see that legions of followers are still downloading this classic space adventure on all formats. Elite is just pure class, no matter which way you look at it. The mixture of space combat, trading and exploration was so ahead of its time back in 1984, and it was responsible for many a wasted youth, as people sat down to try and work out where the best trade routes were, where to find the best cargo etc. And taking the huge universe into consideration, this was no mean feat! The game did spawn sequels, but it's the original that people love, and the core gameplay of Elite has had a huge impact on gaming throughout the years.

Alone In the Dark

Released in 1992, Alone in the Dark began the survival horror ball rolling long before Resident Evil arrived on the scene. As either Emily Hartwood or Edward Carnby, you had to wander around a creepy old mansion, attempting to solve the mystery of Jeremy Hartwood's death. But, this was no normal murder mystery, and it wasn't long before things went awry, with pant-wetting scares aplenty. The mix of 3D polygonal characters and pre-rendered backgrounds – something that would be very popular for a long time – was superb, enhancing the whole oppressive feel of the game, and providing a truly scary adventure. A game every self-respecting horror fan should experience.

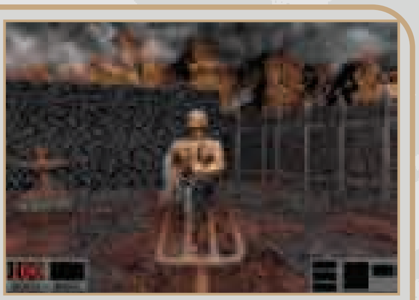


Another World

Also called Out of This World by our American cousins, Delphine's breakaway masterpiece didn't fail to impress when it arrived in 1991, and continues to do so to this day. As Lester, a rather casual-looking nuclear physicist, you were teleported to a strange alien world following a failed atom smashing experiment. This new world was ravaged by slavery and war, with an evil race ruling over the population. It wasn't long before you met up with a friendly inhabitant ('Buddy') and had to escape your decidedly worrying predicament. To this day, Another World's visuals are impressive to behold, and the basic characters are beautifully animated. The gameplay is hard as nails, but always varied and fun. Another World also had a sequel called Heart of the Alien, which was available on the Mega-CD and put you in control of Buddy.



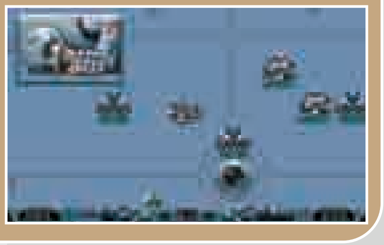
Blood



Blood is a first person shooter of the Doom/Duke 3D era. But, rather than the hellish sacrilegious nature of id's title, or the Hollywood action heroics of Duke, Blood was all rednecks and zombies. As Caleb, you had to slaughter your way through an endless army of freaks and weirdos, using shotguns, flare guns, spray cans, voodoo dolls, dynamite and anything else you could get your hands on (even a rusty pitchfork for that true yokel touch). The graphics were okay, although not up to the standard of Duke, and the single player campaign was dripping with gore and visceral combat. The multiplayer mode is the game's best feature though, and it's a right old riot if you get some friends on a network, thanks mainly to the creative weapons on offer.

Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe

One of the Bitmap Brothers' greatest successes, the original Speedball fused together football, basketball, rugby and sci-fi madness to produce an ultra fast action sport that was as addictive as it was violent. No rules, no holds barred, just plain old aggression. Speedball II: Brutal Deluxe took the game even further, introducing some basic management options, player transfers, a much more detailed arena and properly implemented player skills and positions. It was still fast, addictive and even more enjoyable than ever. And you know what? It still is. So successful is the game, that it's appeared on modern systems (although not to the greatest of receptions), and people on the abandonware trail can't get enough of it.

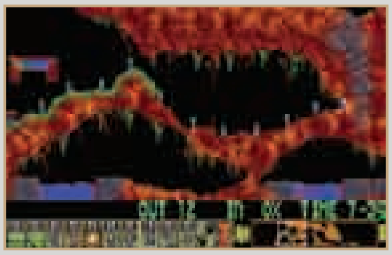


Dune II: The Building of a Dynasty

Long before the RTS antics of Command and Conquer, Westwood released this gem based on Frank Herbert's sci-fi universe, and the strategy game would never be the same again. Dune II was the forerunner of all major RTS titles you'd care to mention. Harvesting 'spice' and building bases was the key to the game, with the ultimate aim being to decimate your enemy in a series of glorious real-time skirmishes. The fact that it had Dune tagged onto it wasn't actually all that important, as the same game with no major licence would have still been great. But, the recognisable and expansive Dune universe helped make the game even more memorable.



Lemmings



Despite being released for almost every single computer known to mankind, Psygnosis' rodent-laden puzzler is still a huge favourite amongst abandonware fans. Who would have thought that indirectly controlling an army of suicidal critters could be so much fun? With tight time limits and the ever-present risk of losing your fluffy chums to a 100 foot drop, you had to use a series of skills to guide the green-haired herd to the goal, robbing them of their inherent urge to top themselves. What started as an easy puzzle title quickly became a hellishly tricky head-pecker that kept you coming back for just one more try. And even though the main characters were a mere handful of pixels, the animation was excellent, and your little friends really did have a personality.

Space Quest IV

Space Quest is hugely popular to this day, and the series spanned a total of six episodes, each starring the hapless space cadet Roger Wilco – Space Janitor, and would be starship captain. The series involved players in all sorts of weird and wonderful adventures, and episode four appears to be one of your all time favourites. The story sees Roger assaulted in a bar by time travelling hoods in the employ of his old nemesis, Sludge Vohaul. However, Roger escapes to the future (to the time of Space Quest XII to be exact), and begins a time travelling adventure to stop Vohaul once and for all. The Space Quest series was always about the characters, and Roger is a great central role. He's stupid, cowardly and most of all, witty.



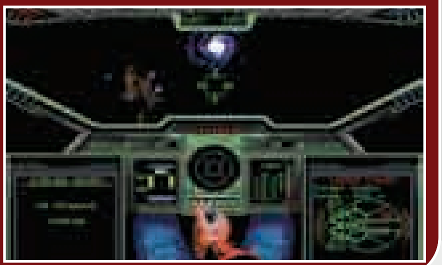
The Secret of Monkey Island

Okay, this is a tricky one. Although listed and requested on many abandonware sites, most do not host the game itself and only include links to buy it. Nonetheless, we had to include Guybrush Threepwood's first run-in with the evil pirate LeChuck, an adventure that easily goes down in history as one of the greatest games of all time. You'll find it hard to find a title with such well designed and realised adventure elements, and you certainly won't find a game with a better sense of humour. The story is excellent, the characters are impeccably designed and the whole thing just oozes quality. Monkey Island was not LucasArts' first adventure, but it was surely its best (Guybrush's later adventures included).



Wing Commander

Before the series turned into an elongated cutscene 'starring' Mark Hamill, Wing Commander was a much more focused and appealing game, and it's the original title that appeals most to abandonware aficionados. Joining the war against the cat-like Kilrathi, you had to prove yourself as a new fighter pilot. This meant flying various sorties against the Kilrathi, as well as escorting allies and navigating troublesome asteroid fields. One of the best things about Wing Commander was the fact that you were rarely alone, and often flew missions with a wingman on your side. Add to that the excellent visuals, in-between mission dialog, and some impressive intro and launch movies, and it's no wonder the game was a smash hit when it was released in 1990.



Global Gaming

Games players, unless they belong to the elitist importing crowd, seldom look past their own doorstep at the gaming world beyond. The truth is that the international history of gaming is far more exciting than many realise. Even in countries that have endured eras of political strife, war and economic sanctions, you can find rich gaming histories that are now in danger of being forgotten thanks to greater globalisation. Each month, Retro Gamer will scour the globe in search of thriving arcade, console and home computer scenes, proving along the way that the old adage of "necessity being the mother of all invention" is true beyond doubt. This month, John Szczepaniak visits Russia to interview some comrades and bring you the real story from behind the iron curtain

For most in the West, Russian gaming begins and ends with Pajitnov's classic, Tetris. This is perhaps unfair, since digging a little deeper reveals a world so vast as to dwarf Tetris entirely – not because of any single game that betters it, but rather the sheer volume of Russian games products.

What makes Russia especially interesting is that its gaming climate was tempered by a combination of the political climate of the early 80s, and the average person's lack of spending power. This resulted in a blend of unusual home grown creations, and also a thriving black market of bootlegged items, based on foreign products from places as far away as Taiwan and the UK.

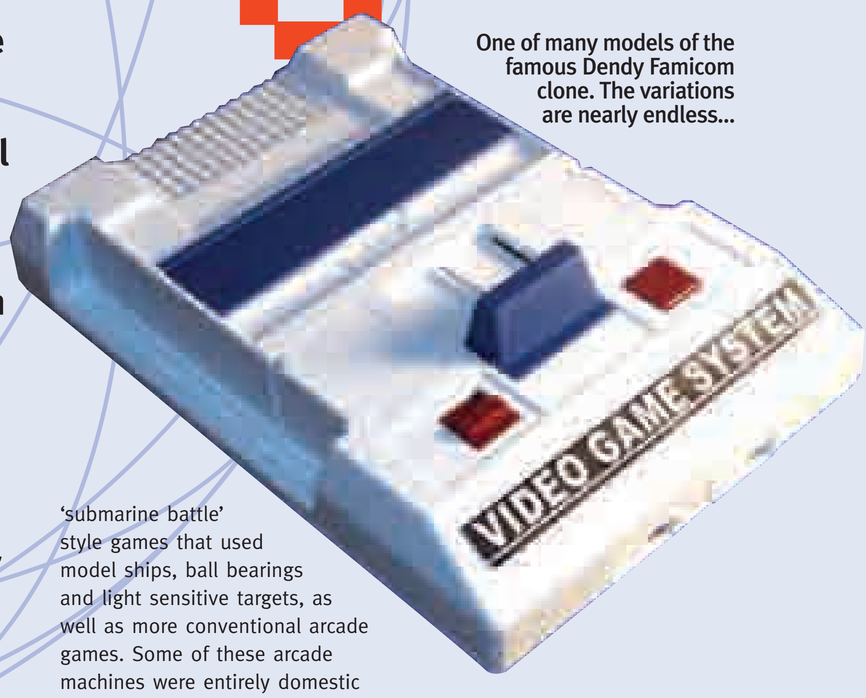
Apart from the obvious problems of documenting such an unimaginably vast grey area – little if any recorded information exists on these things, but for example, there are hundreds of clones of the Famicom system alone – there is the added problem that the Russian games scene has changed dramatically every few years.

Early arcades did exist, but often they were located in remote areas, and featured a mixture of 'submarine battle' style games that used model ships, ball bearings and light sensitive targets, as well as more conventional arcade games. Some of these arcade machines were entirely domestic creations – mostly generic shooting and racing games. Others were copies of Western games with a Russian twist, such as a Pitfall clone that had the sprites replaced by Russian folk tale characters. Graphically these games were of a low quality, and their overall design was years behind Japanese games. It was not until much later (and even then, only in amusement parks and big cities) that the big arcade boom started, riding on the back of games like Street Fighter II.

Home console gaming also proliferated. Thanks to the lack of official market support and the extortionate prices of legitimate items, bootleg systems and software abounded. In Russia, as in most Eastern European countries at the time, there were special shops that sold many imported products and these traded strictly in dollars, which of course put legitimate gaming goods beyond reach of the average player. Unsurprisingly, clone systems abounded – particularly Famicom clones. The most popular 'Famiclone' series came from Dendy, whose name would become synonymous with gaming. Most cartridges included multiple games, and many games still had the original Japanese text, because they were simply Asian hack jobs.

Cloning Sir Clive

Home computers were even more popular than consoles. Due to factors such as high cost and



One of many models of the famous Dendy Famicom clone. The variations are nearly endless...

›Regional facts



Name: Russia
Population: 143.2 Million (2005 estimation)
Official language: Russian
Approximate climate: -25.C to +30.C (depending on location)
Time zones: 11 time zones from GMT+2 to GMT+12
TV type: SECAM 50Hz
Voltage: 220V
Currency: Ruble



The universally known Tetris, a Western icon for Russian games



The handmade, home build Pentagon 128 in one of its many guises

difficulty in manufacturing, Russian citizens went through various different and incompatible models of computer before finally settling on the Sinclair Spectrum as a sort of standard. Electronic engineers who had access to originals soon set about working on various clone models. It's rumoured that the Soviet Union produced more Spectrum clones than the rest of the world combined. That's not surprising when you consider the original Spectrum's cost in relation to the average monthly wage. To buy an original, most citizens would have had to save for several years.

The most popular of the first generation clones was the Pentagon 128, while the Scorpion 256 and Kay 1024 models had large followings later on. Approximately 80% of all Spectrum clones came with a Betadisk disk interface (developed by Technology Research Ltd) already built in. These ran TR-DOS software and proved far more popular than tape-based interfaces.

The Pentagon 128 was basically a hand made computer that came in many forms. It's not unusual to find Pentagons in PC tower cases with a standard keyboard and SVGA monitor, while at other times they would be little more than a collection of circuit boards and wires.

Spectrum culture across Eastern Europe in general was huge. There were several Spectrum magazines and like elsewhere, there were also multi-format magazines (and later many Russian websites) dedicated to gaming. Some interesting home grown games were also developed. Today the scene is still big, with some amazing new software being made by groups such as 'n-Discovery Development' (**www.n-discovery.narod.ru**).

Console passion

Today the PC scene dominates over consoles, with incredibly cheap pirated software available to buy from street kiosks and permanent booths, even in places such as metro-stations. To combat piracy, companies started trying to sell their games cheaply, with companies such as 1C doing professional localisations and then releasing different tailored versions at a low price.

That isn't to say that Russian consoles began and ended with Dendy systems. Despite a far higher price, Japanese Mega Drives became very popular among teens and were seen as a status symbol – despite most of the available games being Japanese. The arrival of the 16-bit consoles also brought about an interesting new phenomenon in the arcades. For people who couldn't afford a Mega Drive or SNES, there were arcades with cheaply constructed cabinets containing these machines, available on a pay-per-minute basis. These machines were often found in supermarkets too, and always attracted a crowd of people. The Bare Knuckle series was very popular among pay-per-minute gamers, as was Contra. But this was a short-lived phenomenon, and after about two years these machines started to disappear – most likely due to conditions improving and people being able to afford the systems themselves.

The PlayStation brought about further great changes in the Russian gaming scene. While this system was very expensive, the games in comparison were extremely cheap. PS games were easy to copy, so again market stalls and kiosks had plenty to sell. Street vendors were always well stocked with all the newest games, at prices ordinary people could afford.

Russian pirates would often translate text-heavy PS games into Russian, but since those who translated them had little understanding of English and even less of Japanese, the results were very hit and miss. These localisation attempts rendered some games unplayable, with notable failures including Final Fantasy Tactics, Civilisation 2 and even Arc the Lad on PS2.

Thanks to the difficulty in making copies of games, systems like the N64 and Saturn never had much success in Russia. Meanwhile, handheld gaming was never particularly popular, though in the early days you could occasionally find various Game & Watch clones.



Just some of the many unofficial Spectrum clones that flooded the Russian market





A selection of unofficial, locally manufactured Game & Watch titles



Imagine playing Japanese Mega Drive games like Bare Knuckle and Contra in an arcade where you paid by the minute

Stuff of legend

There were few if any console games developed locally, in stark contrast to the home computers, on which most native game developers concentrated their efforts. Home grown games often worked with traditional Russian folk lore and were very culture-specific, blending in references and jokes that wouldn't make much sense to a foreigner, so these titles were never released outside the country.

Like many countries around the world, Russia has a rich array of legends and folk tales (many derived from Slavic heritage and tradition) from which to draw inspiration for its games. One good example is Konek-Gorbunok, the tale around which the aforementioned Pitfall clone was built. The story contains many exotic elements including the daughter of the moon and a beached whale called Chewdo-Youdo. There are lots of other fine examples of local legends being used in Russian games.

Russia's cultural background also influences the language of its games. The Russian word for folktale is 'skazka' (meaning simply 'story'), while the word for RPG is 'Rpgeshka', a fusion of the two. But even though Russians have their own words for many such things, there is also a vast and borrowed vocabulary, much as the Japanese have taken words from other countries and made them their own. Aleksei Smimova, a Russian gamer, told us: "I am really amazed at what a vast loanword vocabulary kids who play games in Russia actually have. It's mostly D&D and RPG stuff – quest, mage, paladin, weapon names, and so on. The Russian language, of course, has words for all of those things, since we also have a wealth of heroic myths from feudal times to match the Arthurian canon of the English-speaking world. Just another example of cultural dominance…"

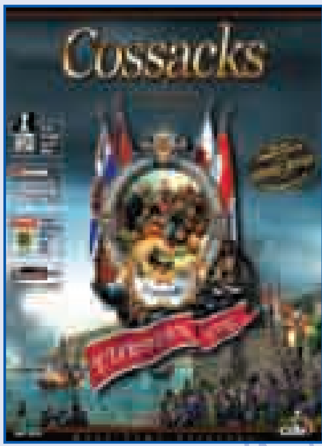
Gaming fellowship

What makes the history of Russian gaming so exciting is not just the freedom offered by the lack of a regulated market, or even the fact that the Russians simply picked and chose only the best bits of international gaming and made these their own – for us, it's the atmosphere and almost exotic nature of Russia's gaming scene. Getting to experience games in the harsh political and economic climate of the 1980s and 90s was something out of the ordinary, making everyone who took part feel special. There was a genuine feeling of camaraderie amongst gamers.

The story of Russian gaming also goes to show that ordinary citizens in this part of the world were interested in the exact same things as ordinary people elsewhere – the benefits of computer technology and the innate joy of gaming.

We've tasted just a small slice of the Russian gaming pie here, but hopefully we've sparked your interest in foreign gaming history. Join us next month, when Retro Gamer treks to another part of the globe to uncover further hidden retro truths.

Special thanks go to Sergei Servianov (of www.gamersquarter.com*) for his invaluable assistance. Thanks also to Fabien Delpierre and Aleksei Smimova for additional help. If there is a country that you would like examined, or you have an interesting story to tell about any other global gaming region, send us an email to:* globalgaming@retrogamer.net.



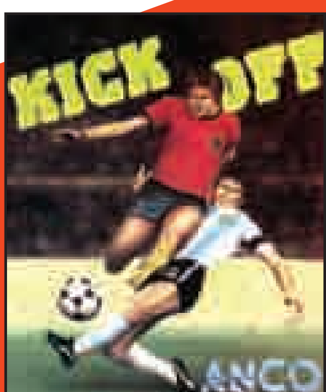


Today, modern Russian-developed PC games such as Cossacks are being released in the West

eMag

KILLER APPS

Football games before the arrival of Kick Off followed a loose, yet still restrictive, set of rules. The action was viewed from an overhead or isometric perspective, the pace was generally slow and the ball pretty much always stuck to the player's foot. Kick Off changed all of that. What's more, it also served as a magnet for many to the 16-bit formats of the time

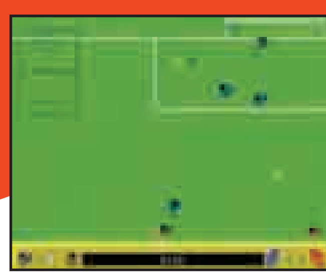


The Commodore Amiga and Atari ST were undoubtedly big jumps forward from the 8-bit formats. Yet progress came at a cost, and both companies were expecting users who had been shelling out £150 maximum for 8-bit machines to stump up closer to £300-400. And given that it was games that primarily sold the likes of the Spectrum and C64 to the masses, it was notable that there were no must-have titles on either format in the early days.

Sure, there were some games that looked jaw-droppingly wonderful in comparison to the other formats. Games such as Weird Dreams, Rocket Ranger and Shadow of the Beast all looked the business in the all-important shop windows. But none of them had the long term, mass market appeal that was going to be needed to shift boxes.

Enter stage left Dino Dini, and an until-then unspectacular, yet established, software house, Anco. Dini had put together a football game that played differently to everything else it was up against. He realised that visually you could make compromises, and that it was the gameplay that would sell the game – word of mouth, if you will. The irony of course is that over time, many companies have fallen into the trap of making games that were earmarked as killer apps look devilishly wonderful, yet were







"It looks rubbish!", your mates would mock. But few would still criticise Kick Off after prolonged play

›Sensible all-stars

When the relationship between Anco and Dino Dini soured, neither managed anywhere near the peaks of their glory days again. Both the former's Kick Off 3 and the latter's Goal! were pale imitations of what had gone before.

Instead, the mantle passed to Sensible Software, whose Sensible Soccer was to be the last great overhead-perspective football game. With both this and the immense Sensible World Of Soccer, Sensible made a barefaced illegal approach and snared Kick Off players looking to take their game forward, and lured a whole new legion of fans too. It was no killer app, however, arriving at a time when the userbase for both the ST and the Amiga was substantial anyway (although it no doubt converted some). Yet had it arrived a few years earlier, it could well have been...



Following the success of the original Kick Off, sequels and spin-offs flooded forth

ultimately bereft of decent long-term gameplay. Kick Off simply turned the formula on its head.

Super sub

When Kick Off arrived, the gaming press understandably heaped pretty much every accolade going onto it. Here was the football game that didn't follow the hard and fast rules, that genuinely rewarded practice, and that – crucially – in multi-player mode remains to this day one of the most downright addictive pieces of software ever created.

The spectacular factor in Kick Off's success though was the aforementioned word of mouth. Anco wasn't a big company, and its advertising budget had limits. But such was the impact of the game that it built its reputation guerilla-style, and stayed in the best-seller charts on a permanent basis until its sequel came along.

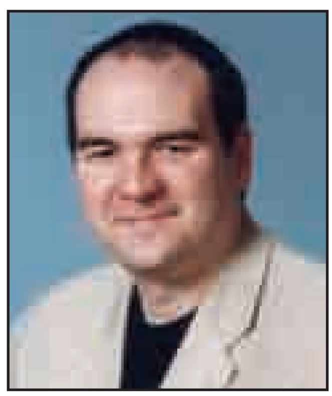
Yet it had another effect. Whilst clearly not single-handedly responsible for the 16-bit boom, it's hard to think of a game that added more fuel to the tank than Kick Off. Both the ST and the Amiga formats were the ones to truly benefit – the PC version never really topped the table in the same way – and it wasn't uncommon to see both machines being sold at the same time as Anco's title.

The inevitable sequel arguably added to the impact, mopping up still more users who hadn't at that stage migrated to the 16-bit platforms. Even the hybrid of Kick Off and a management engine, Player Manager, sold by the bucket load and made its contribution. Yet strangely, on every other format that the Kick Off franchise reached, it failed to light the touch paper in quite the same way. The 8-bit versions fell because, frankly, they were crap. The console versions – Super Kick Off, anyone? – never found their foothold either. With Kick Off 2, the franchise and its effect on computer sales peaked, and whilst you could happily argue that the Amiga and ST would have succeeded without Dino Dini, you could also happily debate the fact that had it not been for Kick Off, it would have all taken that little bit longer.

An underdog story

What makes Kick Off a rare commodity in this series, incidentally, is that it was an entirely unplanned killer app. Last month, for instance, we looked at Tetris, a title that Nintendo battled through the courts to get hold of as it appreciated its importance in the possible success of the GameBoy. And look at, for instance, Halo on the Xbox, a title that Microsoft pumped millions into, because it ring-fenced the title as its killer app a long time before it made the shelf of your local gaming emporium. The closest the 16-bit formats got to anything of that ilk was when Gremlin offered Commodore exclusivity on the Zool character, with the intention of putting him up against Sonic and Mario.

Kick Off, however, just happened. It was a surprise, and worked so well precisely for that reason. There was no cynicism, no big name tie-ins, no brand names littered throughout the game and barely a few print adverts to support its launch. And yet, in a victory for the power of the consumer, it deservedly cleaned up in a way you find hard to visualise happening again in today's modern marketplace. That it shifted a few machines in the process was simply a very welcome side effect.



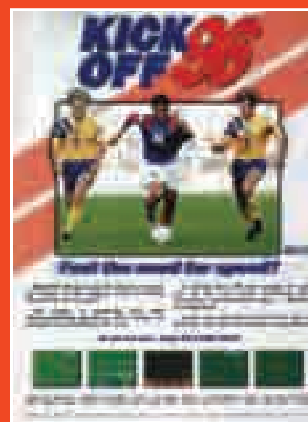
Dino Dini – "the godfather of the football game" – is currently working on an as-yet unnamed football game for DC Studios

"Such was the impact of the game that it built its reputation guerilla-style, and stayed in the best-seller charts on a permanent basis until its sequel came along"

›Little kicks

Anco was clearly keen to cash in on the success of Kick Off, and the first fruits of this were the Extra Time add-on pack and the management hybrid Player Manager. The former actually added very little to the game, a formula that Anco followed for each add-on pack it ultimately released for its football games. Player Manager, despite having a relatively crude management game tacked on, actually worked very well. But looking back, it was Kick Off 2 that the franchise, the publisher and Dino Dini himself are best remembered for. Even though a dedicated hardcore are still vocal in their dislike for the game, the overwhelming majority lapped it right up and arguably the sequel itself became a killer app as well.

Sadly, over time Anco ran the Kick Off franchise into the ground, with the low point being the embarrassing Kick Off 96, a game that was blatantly unplayable and regarded as one of the worst football titles ever created. Dini didn't write the official Kick Off 3, instead taking what was intended as the code for the game to Virgin Interactive, who published it as Goal! Yet the magic was gone, Goal! failed to bring back the Kick Off glory days, and Sensible Soccer was left to clean up.

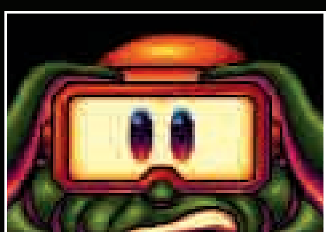


GTW
Games That Weren't

In the first of a regular series of features, Frank Gasking takes a stroll through the gaming graveyard, digging up titles that were supposedly lost forever. But were these games worth grieving for? Or were you lucky to be spared from them?

Flood 2

Bullfrog, 1992, ST/Amiga/PC/SNES/Mega drive



With groundbreaking speech effects throughout, Flood proved to be a huge hit on the ST/Amiga back in 1990, and so it was inevitable that a sequel would follow. This time the main character, Quiffy, would also make an appearance on 16-bit consoles.

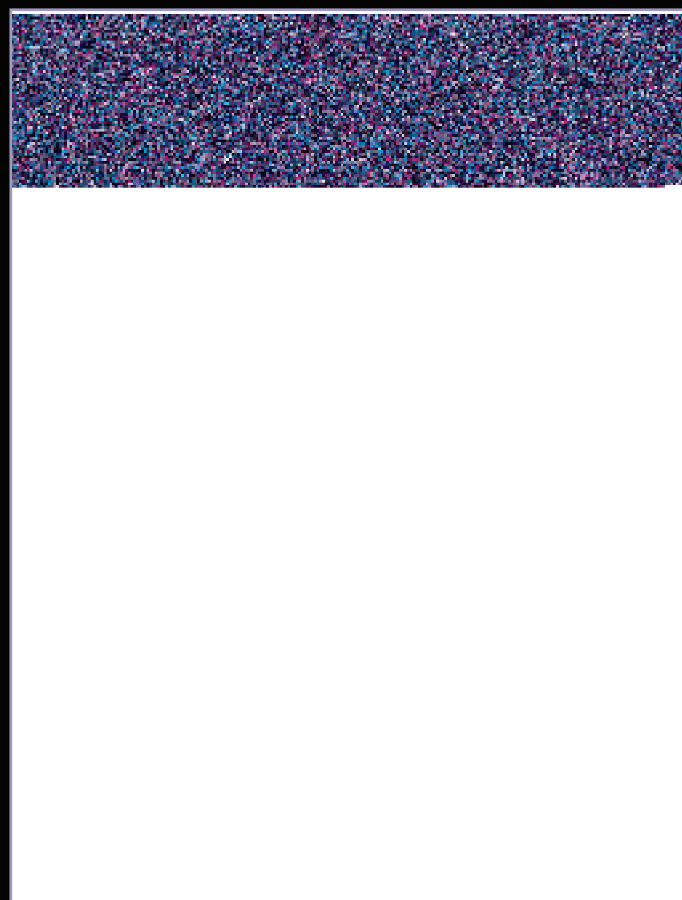
Developed by ex-Ocean coder Paul Hughes with graphics by Mark R Jones, Flood 2 promised more of the same, with a multitude of additional features. Paul and Mark wanted to recreate the feel and playability of classic games they loved as teenagers. The idea was to mix "great graphics" with "old school" playability. Games such as Starquake, Dynamite Dan and Wizards Lair were just some of their many inspirations.

Designs emerged featuring various pick-ups and intriguing ideas such as 'The Vacuum Cleaner of Ole Ole Kumquat', brought on by two cherubs who would then suck you up and deposit you on a higher level. There was also a 'pumpkin mask' that Quiffy would pick up and use as a smart bomb, shouting "Boo!" at baddies and scaring them to death. Even a bar of soap was to act as an invincibility pick-up, covering Quiffy in soap bubbles to make him unrecognizable to enemies. These were just few of the many crazy ideas planned.

Flood 2 started life on the ST, showing off a decent pre-shift scroll and loads of sprites running around. However, due to the "wonderful wisdom of the marketing", it was decided that the ST market was dying, so the game was moved to the Amiga and PC. In the end, development of all versions ceased when Paul and Mark refused to move in-house to continue the project. Development had been ongoing for a full six months and yet the plug was pulled just days before the contract was to be signed.

Paul created a few early test demos which showed lots of promise, and described the game by saying: "It was as playable as any collect-em-up scrolling platform game of the early 90s!" ST and Amiga versions were fully playable; PC almost playable and console versions were only in planning stages.

Fortunately, all of Mark's design sketches survived, and can be found on this month's coverdisc. Paul will be digging out what remains of the demo very soon, so who knows, maybe you will be able to see this promising sequel for yourself?

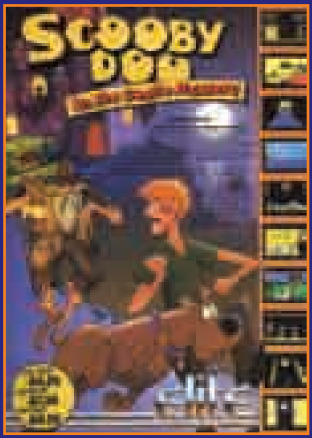




Much of Flood II was designed on paper, including character designs and level layouts

Scooby Doo in the Castle Mystery

Elite, 1986, Spectrum/Amstrad/C64



Dragon's Lair was a technical marvel in the 80s with its impressive (albeit, slightly unplayable) Laserdisc technology. Elite jumped on the bandwagon with its licence of the popular *Hanna Barbera* cartoon.

Originally beginning as a text adventure, Scooby Doo grew to include extra features, transforming itself into an 8-bit laserdisc-style game. The game was set around Shaggy's aunt's castle, with all sorts of ghostly goings on. All the popular characters were present, with their job to try and solve mysterious occurrences at the castle.

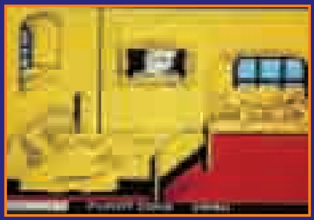
Various adverts and previews were shown in magazines, depicting a very impressive game. It was unlike anything seen before on any 8-bit. You were invited to direct the action yourself, and not be restricted as in other games.

The game would feature eight action sequences, separated by descriptive scenes where the main characters would interact. Action sequences focused on Scooby and Shaggy searching the castle through different viewpoints. The breakaway to descriptive scenes would give hints and tips to aid your mystery solving. All sound effects were synchronised with the action, creating the perfect illusion of watching an interactive cartoon. Each new game would present new problems and obstacles, creating a fresh experience each time.

It was never going to be easy trying to cram this game into the limited memory. Accurate animations and scenes were created, and the poor programmers had the hefty (and eventually impossible) task of squeezing it all in.

Elite's Steve Wilcox told us: "My brother Richard, Andy Williams and Jon Harrison actually developed a significant amount of Scooby Doo and what they did was breathtaking for the time – it was like a succession of interactive cutscenes, if that's not a contraction in terms. Sadly, as with many a grand plan, they found that they'd devoted so many resources to the creation of the first few scenes that it would have been a very, very short game. At this point, with pressure on us from *Hanna Barbera* to deliver the game, Gargoyle Games was brought in on the act and it quickly created the game that was eventually released."

Sadly, Gargoyle's Scooby Doo was a simple platform affair. All that now exists of the original concept are a few scans that appeared in a *Crash* magazine preview and a full page teaser advert.





Scooby Doo in the Castle Mystery – "The first ever computer cartoon!" – was sadly not to be

Moto-X

Software Creations, 1994, SNES



As you'll soon discover, there are many times when games were fully completed, but strangely never allowed out of the doors. Moto-X was one such casualty that was completed and then surprisingly trashed! Often you'd expect this to happen when a game is particularly poor, but as far as can be seen, there doesn't seem to be too much wrong here...

Moto-X was developed for Nintendo by Software Creations' Steve Ruddy (of Bubble Bobble C64 fame), with a hand from the Pickford brothers. The development process lasted over a period of eight months and was one of the first titles developed by Steve at the new US-based Software Creations studio.

The game is best described as an update of Nintendo's Excitebike on the NES and was actually the second incarnation of the game. An earlier version was canned back in 1992/93, which was to be a mix of Excitebike and Powerdrift (an interesting combination). Steve used some of the older game's routines to create a much-improved title, and with the gameplay more focused.

According to Steve, Moto-X (although playable) lacked depth. The game was made up of three skill levels, each of which had five different tracks and a bonus level to get through. The shortage of depth was down to the distinct lack of variety between the levels. As the SNES was home to such fine titles as Super Mario Kart and Donkey Kong Country, Moto-X was distinctively unimpressive. However, things were improved with some superb heavy metal tunes by audio masters Tim and Geoff Follin.

So with a fully complete game and full approval by Nintendo, the game was ready to go; but the publishers weren't so keen. Trimark Interactive suddenly caught cold feet in the console games market, deciding that 'interactive movie' games were the future. Its interest drifted away from consoles and the game's release was cancelled as a result.

Steve still has the game on a prototype cartridge, but cannot release it due to legal ties with Nintendo. However, you can check out some exclusive video of the game on this month's coverdisc (thanks to Steve) to see what you are all missing...





Lunar Jetman



In last month's magazine, Frank lifted the lid on the C64 version of Lunar Jetman, a game that no-one knew existed until it was found in Martin Galway's disk collection. To see this long lost preview in action, be sure to view the video footage on this month's coverdisc.

STRANGE GAMES

Per Arne Sandvik continues his trek through the weird and wonderful, stopping off this month to consider the product plugs that have crept into games over the years

Product placement is a funny thing. Not 'ha-ha' funny, but more a 'that's mildly intriguing' funny. On one hand, having logos and products crammed into the frame while you're trying to enjoy a film can really be distracting. On the other, real brands give stories an elevated sense of realism as opposed to make-believe ones like *Mr. Triceps* or *Before Nine Mints*.

Product placement in film and television has received a lot of attention from the media and academics, but when it comes to video games, talk has been somewhat limited up until recently. This despite the fact that brand plugs in games is an exponentially growing phenomenon. Titles like Tony Hawk, True Crime: Streets of LA, The Sims Online and Splinter Cell include a plethora of trademarked products, and it will not stop there.



But this is no new thing as retro gamers have been exposed to product endorsements for years, with just about every sports game containing advertisements for other titles from the developer or consumer products. Maniac Mansion is claimed to be the first game to walk this route, featuring the Pepsi Cola brand (it was originally Coke, but the trademark couldn't be cleared in time). In Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II, evil foot soldiers tried to squash you into turtle stew with giant Pizza Hut billboards (in the US, the cartridge even came with a coupon for a personalised pan pizza). Gremlin's Zool, meanwhile, was famously sponsored by Chupa Chups, while the UK versions of James Pond II: Robocod opened with a blatant Penguin commercial. And who could forget the ice cold bottles of Bud you slid down the bar in the original version of Midway's Tapper?



This game is brought to you by the following tried and trusted sponsors...

›Clumsy Colin

One of the first software publishers to jump under the covers with a convenience food manufacturer was Mastertronic, whose Action Biker game featured Clumsy Colin, cartoon star of the KP Skips commercials. However, Action Biker was a generic racing game which lazily had the KP branding added later. Of course, the fact that Action Biker would be on sale in newsagents and garage forecourts alongside KP's crispy corn fried snack certainly didn't affect sales of the game...





The European version of Biker Mice from Mars was overloaded with Snickers branding

Squirrel turd

Few games have exceeded the European version of Biker Mice from Mars when it comes to violently hammering a brand into young minds. The somewhat decent SNES racer, based on the cartoon that tried oh so hard to be the next Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, had Snickers bars everywhere. In fact, 'everywhere' doesn't quite cover it. There might quite possibly be a higher percentage of Snickers in this game than there is in a Snickers bar.

First of all, there are billboards and banners promoting the chocolate wherever you turn your motorcycle, hovercraft or roadworthy mutant insect, including the outer space track and the one in the sewer. Secondly, Snickers replace the nitro power-up of the original version of the game. Thirdly, Last Chance, the bike shop run by Not April O'Neill (she has a blue jumpsuit instead of a yellow one, so she's obviously a completely different character) offers Snickers bars (at $2,500 a pop) instead of armour plating. How chocolate and peanuts can replace sheets of steel to defend you against crazy space rays is hard to understand, but this game takes place in a world only intelligible to Douglas Adams, and he's dead. Fourthly, the winner of each race stands up, candy bar in hand, and declares that "Even winners need something to satisfy their hunger." In one particularly bizarre example, doctor Karbunkle menacingly displays a syringe filled with dubious content in his other fist. Exactly what kind of hunger are we talking about here, doctor?

Curiously, Snickers is produced by the same corporation that provides us with Mars bars. One has to wonder which member of their marketing department decided Snickers was the one to be featured in Biker Mice from *Mars*.

Super-size me

Games featuring products is one thing. Games forged *around* a product is another altogether. Unsurprisingly, practically every example of this phenomenon revolves around consumable products. After all, food and drink has been a central element since the dawn of video gaming. Pac-Man was *about* eating, and save the occasional coins and crystals, fruits have been the central pick-up elements in games. Too weak to break bricks? Eat a mushroom. Low on lives? Collect a hundred bananas. About to collapse after fighting off hordes of mohawked street punks? Smash an oil drum open and eat the hamburger that falls out. If it's good enough for mayor Haggar, it's good enough for you.

You've probably played some of the games that fall into the 'advertisement disguised as a platformer' category. Cool Spot was released for 16-bit machines and is nothing but one big 7UP commercial. Spot himself is either a part of the logo, or a bottle cap, or both. In addition, there are at least three McDonald's games, and in at least one of them Ronald himself embarks on a wacky adventure instead of sending a couple of kids to put their lives on the line like he usually does. There were also titles based on the mascots from Wimpy, Domino's Pizzas, California Raisins and Kool-Aid. And these aren't the only games created solely to promote a brand.

Want mayo on that?

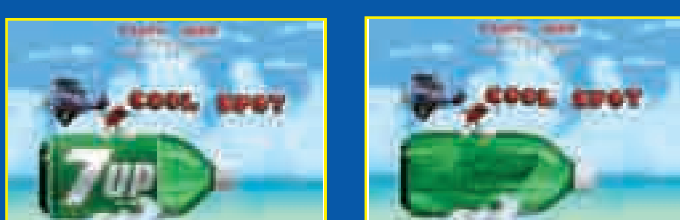
What's a bit surprising is that most examples in this category are pretty decent games, if a bit conventional. 'Conventional' is however not a word you'd want to use when it comes to Motokochan No Wonder Kitchen for the SNES. Most product-centred games try to at least throw a flimsy storyline into the mix. Ronald McDonald is out to search for treasure and Cool Spot has to rescue his friends who were all kidnapped for no reason. Not the case in Wonder Kitchen. This game is about eating mayonnaise, period. *Ajinomoto* mayonnaise, that is. Accept no substitutes.

Well, the game isn't *only* about eating mayonnaise. First, you have to read grocery lists and find the ingredients needed to cook the dishes required to finish the game. This is one of the few games to support the SNES mouse, so you collect these ingredients by clicking around on the screen until you've found them all. Perhaps there's a head of cabbage in one of the cannons on the pirate ship? Perhaps a merry group of leprechauns will pop out of the fridge and dance a merry leprechaun dance before turning into potatoes? Click around and you'll find out.

When you've collected everything you need, you travel to a magical island where you'll find a kitchen. Here, your objective is to combine the ingredients in the right order (a process made somewhat complicated by the Japanese-English language barrier) to make a delicious meal such as fish-filled tomatoes with mayonnaise, pineapple fruit salad with mayonnaise or vegetable omelette with mayonnaise. The latter dish even opens a mini-game where you can tap into your creative side. Unwrap your bottle of Ajinomoto mayonnaise and hum along to the following fanfare, and then proceed to decorate your omelette with a smiley face, a twirl, a yolky rendition of da Vinci's The Last Supper, or whatever you see fit.

The mayo madness doesn't stop there, however. Between meals you are treated to facts about the product, such as how mayonnaise originated in France (a story which inexplicably involves hats), how Ajinomoto is the leading brand in its area, or how the combination of ingredients in mayonnaise can cure you if you have a viral infection. For reasons unknown, the vira from Dr. Mario make a cameo in this last presentation.

So, is this sort of advertisement something to be shunned or embraced? Probably a bit of both. The Dole logos in Super Monkey Ball don't make it a lesser game, and in many 'real-world' games like Grand Theft Auto, actual products can infuse the world with a genuine metropolitan feel. There are however some areas where most of us would like to be spared from this sort of exposure, but the titles where it really counts are relatively safe. After all, the devil will be investing in double insulation before a major fast-food chain opens shop on Zebes or in Hyrule. McMoblin burger, anyone?



Cool Spot was released to promote 7UP, yet the soda branding was strangely missing from the European version of the game (right)

Retro Scene

All the latest news from the retro scene, brought to you by the Retro Gamer news hounds

Pac-Man enters the Dragon

Still in the early development stages, Colin at **www.collywobbles.net** is developing a Pac-Man clone called Wobman for the Dragon 32 with the added possibility of it also being compatible with the Tandy CoCo II.

The title will be displayed in monochrome as it will use the machine's high resolution mode, but despite this hiccup, it's otherwise shaping up very nicely and looks very close to the original pill-popping hit. The kind folk at Cronosoft are considering releasing the game once finished, and are also putting the finishing touches to the CPC game Iron Sphere, which will also appear on the Spectrum. Iron Sphere, by SJM Remakes, is a traditional 2D puzzler and will feature some solid visuals and addictive gameplay.



Iron Sphere is just one of several releases due out shortly from the Cronosoft camp

Another interesting development for the CPC from the Cronosoft camp is a port of Fun Park. Originally written for the 16Kb Speccy, the CPC version is expected to include additional features thanks to the extra memory available. From what we've seen it's certainly looking good. For more information about these and other new games for old formats, hop along to **www.cronosoft.co.uk**.

Retro anime

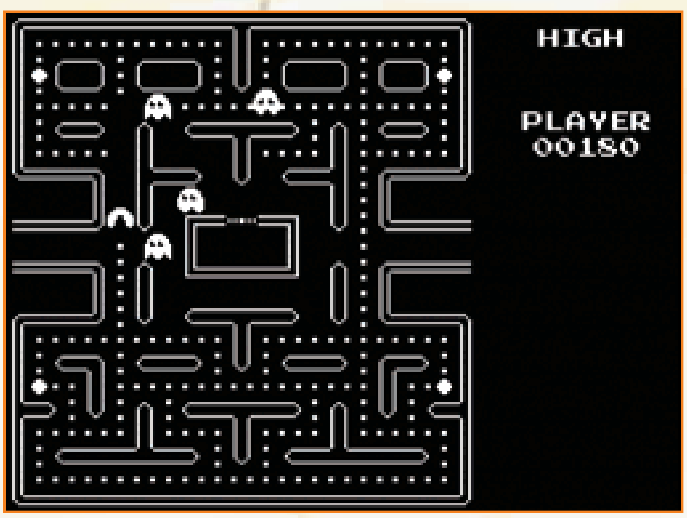
Cameron Kaiser, of Computer Workshop, is currently working on a new title called Geotrope for the Commodore 64. The game will be a first person adventure influenced by popular anime flicks, and will feature many puzzles mixed in with impressive cutscenes and animation. It might not look like the bee's knees at first glance, but the graphics engine is one of the most advanced a C64 can handle without any extra expansions or additional power.

The game will be available as shareware for emulators, with an additional small cost for the real media version. For more information, visit **www.armory.com/~spectre/cwi** where you can also find out about other Computer Workshop software.

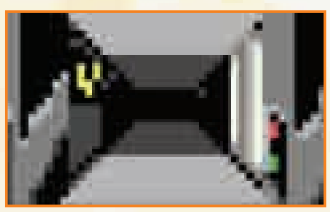
Jaguar homebrew

Not to miss out on homebrew development, fans of Atari's pseudo 64-bit beast will soon be able to enjoy a great port of the classic Snakes. Announced on **www.atariage.com**, Lars Hennig is working at full pelt to finish this game, called JagWorm, but is also asking enthusiasts to help with the project. If you are interested in finding out more about this promising title, or you can offer help in its development, head over to **www.starcat-dev.de/jagworm/info.html**.

In addition, there is another good-looking game for the Jaguar currently pending completion. Based on the popular board game, Reversi is a logical strategy game in which the player is pitted against the computer to take control of the board by capturing a line of the opponent's colour. When there is no more space left on the board, the player who has the most of their colour left is the winner. For more



It may be monochrome, but the Dragon's version of Pac-Man is shaping up very well indeed





Considering the Commodore 64 is running at a basic 1Mhz, these visuals are very impressive





Classic gaming comes to the Atari Jaguar, thanks to the ever-growing homebrew scene

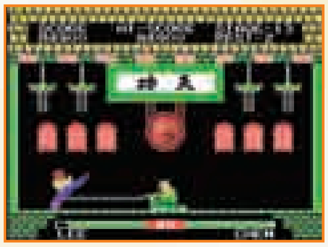
information visit **http://home.t-online.de/home/Matthias.Domin/jaguar_reversi.htm**.

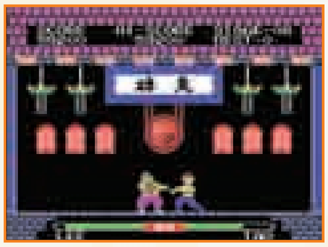
Yie Ar CV

If you're a ColecoVision fan and are looking for some hardcore kung-fu action, then your boat may well and truly be in. Eduardo Mello of Opcode Games (who previously published Space Invaders Collection and Sky Jaguar for the ColecoVision) has announced that the latest title to emerge from his classics stable is none other than Yie Ar Kung Fu, the excellent forerunner to hits such as International Karate and Street Fighter.

The game will be based on the MSX version of the scrapper, but will feature graphics taken from the NES incarnation. The 32Kb ColecoVision release will come boxed, complete with smart looking manual.

To find out more about this exciting release, visit **www.opcodegames.com**, or check eBay for the first official sale of the game (**http://cgi.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewItem&item=8177834595**).







Relive the classic martial arts fight fest on the ColecoVision

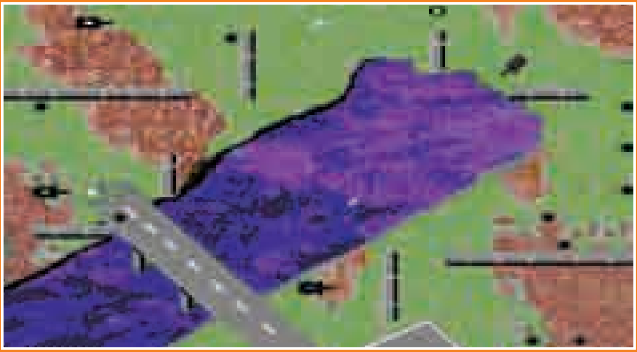
Commodore on tour

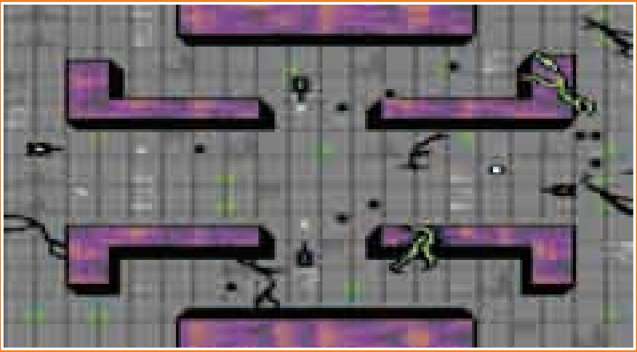
C64 innovators Protovision wowed everyone with the UK launch of both Tanks 3000 and Metal Dust at the Commodore Scene 'get-together' 2005, which was held on the 19th and 20th of March. Tanks 3000 drew particular attention, as it allows up to four people to play simultaneously (thanks to Protovision's own special multiplayer adapter). For those of you who have missed news about this title, it's played across 10 different battlefields with six power-ups to collect and dangerous mines to avoid. It will be readily available from **www.protovision-online.com** by the time you read this.

As the game was demonstrated, it was suggested to C16 enthusiast Chris Snowden (of **www.commodore16.com**) that Protovision's four-player adapter may be compatible with the C16/+4, and if so, such software could then be created (or even ported) to this under-rated Commodore platform. Something might well be in the pipeline, so watch this space!

Also at the meeting, Jason Kelk launched and demonstrated many of his own games and other productions by Cosine Designs, including Astro Nell (VIC-20), Reaxion (Plus/4) and Lunar Blitz (VIC-20 and C16). Reaxion and Astro Nell were particular highlights of the day – especially the latter, which stunned everyone by running in just the unexpanded 3.5Kb memory of the VIC-20. Jason went on to demonstrate some of his unfinished work from years gone by, and had the latest version of Pinball Dreams for the C64 to hand (currently being ported by the guys at **http://interstyles.nl**). All went down well with the attendees, who were all hungry to see more new software for Commodore machines.

For those keen to see more Commodore developments, there is another Commodore Scene meeting planned for later in the year. This is likely to happen between mid-June and early-July. The plan for the next event is to have one day as a dedicated programming workshop across all Commodore platforms in addition to the usual game launches and chat (don't forget the booze!) If you are interested in attending, please contact **commodorescene@btopenworld.com**, or see **www.commodorescene.org.uk**.





Tanks 3000 wowed punters at the recent Commodore Scene meeting

<Screenplay 2005



Paul Drury provides a behind-the-scenes look at the recent Screenplay festival, held in Nottingham over two days in February

I can hear the bear's muted roar echo ominously along the corridor, so I cast aside the remote control car I've been vainly using to try and collect golden egg boxes and stumble towards the final exit. Naturally, my way is blocked by a dancing nine-foot high joystick. There's a horrible panic, as I desperately fumble in my pack for the one thing that can save me – a copy of Daley Thompson's Decathlon, a game guaranteed to destroy joysticks of any size. I brandish it triumphantly, like a vampire-slaying priest with his silver cross. The peripheral wilts and I'm free to escape from Reactor Towers...

All this would have been pretty leftfield for a videogame, but as a live action experience, it explores new depths of surrealism. Ghouls and GHAOS was staged by art collective Reactor as part of this year's Screenplay festival and involved the player being greeted as 'Linksy' by their guide, 'Spickle' – a self proclaimed hologram, wrapped in silver foil, wearing a Robin Hood hat and holding a large cardboard recreation of Professor Yaffle from *Bagpuss*. After donning a cumbersome cardboard and cellophane helmet, I was led through the streets to a disused building and deposited in a maze of rooms and corridors, containing various challenges, from spud gun fights, bursting balloons on my back whilst surrounded by yapping toy dogs and crawling through a cardboard box labyrinth in search of the egg boxes which would add up to my final score.

The whole thing played out as an affectionate tribute to videogame cliches and children's TV – being confronted by a grinning Tony Hart asking if I had any 'art' for his gallery before he would let me look down his U-bend is an image that I will take to the grave – but set in an environment of dark hallways, stark white walls and hidden passages behind drapes, which was oddly unsettling.

Game on

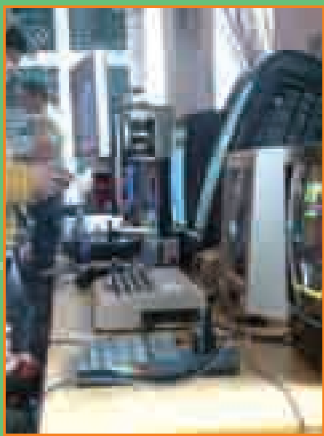
Funny, unique and physically exhausting, the 45 minute 'game' fitted in comfortably with a festival that prides itself on celebrating game culture in all its diverse guises. Now in its fifth year, the Nottingham based event, held over the last weekend in February at the city's Broadway Cinema, certainly has much that is 'now'. The first *European Machinima* screening (films created using game engines) featured Voldo from Soul Calibur dancing to Nelly's 'Hot In Herre' and philosophising Master Chiefs. The cinema hosted a big screen games tournament with the likes of Burnout 3 and Halo 2, masterfully compered by TV



Let 'Spickle' take you by the hand and lead you through the streets on Nottingham



Stay off the sidewalk – there's a game of Pavement Pong in progress...



Shoot-em-ups were available to play on a variety of classic machines

presenters Darren and Jamie from *Gamezville* (who'll you'll be disappointed to know were charming, approachable and actually really into games). Elsewhere, you could join in debates on topics as varied as 'Gender and Game Culture' to 'The Soundtrack to your Game', where Suddi Raval, a veteran of game audio, explained in graphic detail how he creates bullet sound effects by beating slabs of meat with a hammer. The squeamish might have preferred to listen to presentations from a designer of innovative MMORPG 'Second Life', hear about the 'Ere Be Dragons' project which utilises your heart rate rather than a joypad, or just marvel at musical battling GameBoys at the opening club night, 'Attract Mode'.

But a festival that recognises gaming is evolving also knows where it came from, and the retro content was considerable. Perhaps most visible was the 'Pavement Pong' projection, created by Chris Evans (**www.wewilldestroyyou.com**), whose previous projects have included both a live action version of Space Invaders and secretly filming players' facial contortions as they battle on Taito's classic. Here, willing participants could play the daddy of videogames by controlling the bats with their feet, though the movement detection set-up worked best if you were wearing white socks. As Nottingham is a fashion-conscious city, many resorted to strapping white plastic bags over their shoes and dancing up and down into the early hours, which caused many passing drunks to stare quizzically at their cans of Special Brew.

'Endless Fire' was just as enlightening, as visual artist Tom Betts traced the evolution of the shoot-em-up, cleverly highlighting how the genre has retained its core simplicity, whilst embracing gameplay innovation and visual experimentation. Upstairs, an exhibition of shoot-em-ups, from Jetpac and Uridium, through to Thunderforce IV and Tempest 2000, right up to Rez, Ikaruga and Gradius V, reminded all why the genre has been so enduring. Between blasting, you could admire the marvellous 'Capcom Cross-Stitch', a display of Street Fighter characters rendered in intricate needlework. Retro Gamer hopes to find out more about this remarkable fusing of old and new crafts and the artist behind it, Faye Lampshire, in a future issue.

Gamers could continue to enjoy some old school delights in the retro arcade housed in the foyer of the cinema. Three MAME cabs hosting forty games apiece kept everyone happy, and thanks to the persuasive powers of the dashing Jonathan Thompson of **www.retroarcade.co.uk**, a tabletop machine now has a permanent home in the Broadway's bar (hurrah!), but the highlights were a Defender cab on freeplay and a Star Wars cockpit, a poignant reminder of why 31 million with just six shields is, like, really good (see 'High Score' article this issue).



Paul Drury in conversation with guest of honour, Mr Matthew Smith

No world record on Star Wars then, but the arcade did welcome Galaxian world champion Gary Whelan. He didn't break his own record, though it was still a joy to witness his showboating, which topped 100,000 on his first attempt. And he was being mercilessly heckled throughout for blaming the joystick – it's a poor workman…

Mr Smith

It wasn't all about playing mind. The game-making workshops were equally inspiring, as kids queued up to take their first tentative steps into game design. I couldn't help getting dewy-eyed, wondering whether a future genius might be in the room, only to notice Matthew Smith seeing if he could bag a place. Maybe that Spectrum game he's working on will get finished after all.

Ah, Matthew Smith. Throughout the weekend, he was constantly being thanked by people, grateful for their childhood games of Jet Set Willy, a few blaming him for failing their O-Levels and some, racked with timeless guilt, even attempted to pay him the 30p royalty they cheated him out of by playing a pirated copy. Matthew too got all emotional when he was asked to sign the Broadway's 'Wall of Fame' and was immortalised next to one of his all-time heroes – Norman Wisdom.

I'm fully aware of the moratorium on talk of all things Matthew in these pages, so I'll keep it brief (the full interview we conducted has been transcribed by **www.redkeyreddoor.com** and should be archived at **www.screenplay.org.uk**). Trivia fans may be interested to know this was the first time he had actually seen the end of JSW – it was shown on the cinema screen as he spoke – and the fish and sword that appear on completion of Manic Miner was his attempt to create 'a little gaming folklore', hence the religious imagery. Oh, and fans of 'Hello' magazine might want to know he is an impeccable house guest and even bought my kids some sweets. Ok, they had pictures of marijuana leaves on them, but even so…

The Sunday evening concluded with the hardest games quiz ever (a 'Spot the Ball' question on Pong is tough…), DJs Vastik Root and Bury and Disinter spinning game-inspired electronica, and excited talk of next year, but as I left the cinema, snow was falling on the Pavement Pong projection outside, each flake became beautifully pixelated, and it was all about the moment.

Special thanks to Jon Jordan and Chris Evans for the photos.

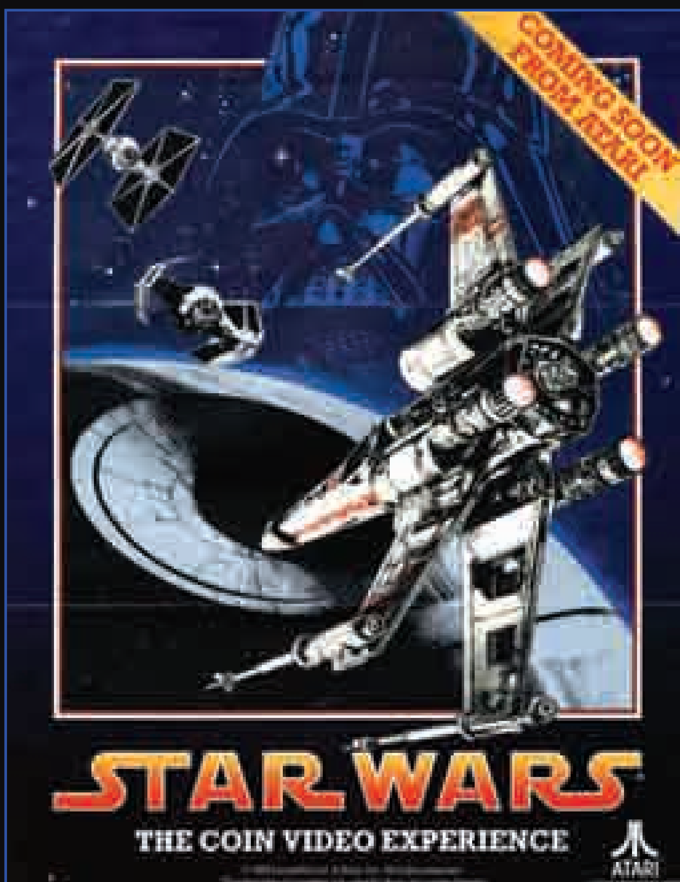


High score hero Gary Whelan attempts to top his Galaxian world record

1UP HIGH SCORE

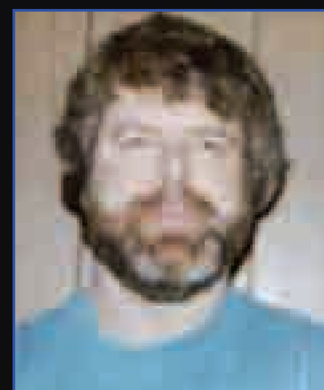
THE STORIES BEHIND THE SCORES

As Star Wars fever builds in the run-up to Episode III, Paul Drury speaks to David Palmer, holder of the all-time high score on Atari's original Star Wars coin-op



Now let's be clear about this. A Star Wars score of 31,660,614 is going to turn heads. After five hours of destroying countless Death Stars, David Palmer achieved this mammoth points haul back on July 31st 1986 as part of a Twin Galaxies Tournament, which had the added frisson of any world records being entered into the Guinness Book. Hugely impressive – and then you realise the score was made under 'tournament' settings, which means no bonus shield after each successful trench assault – just those six shields you start with. And that's it.

It's been described as one of the top ten arcade performances ever, but David remains quietly modest. "Well, it's certainly generated more talk than any other, I guess. There's been a lot of controversy, because for a while it wasn't recognised as the top score for Tournament setting on Twin Galaxies Scoreboard, as some people were telling Walter Day [the 'Scorelord' at TG] it wasn't possible and must have been on an incorrect setting. Often guys who can't get a score say it's impossible, but that's only because they can't get it.

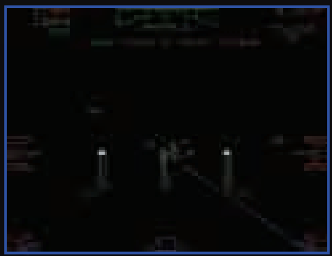


Star Wars record holder David Palmer. When he's not playing Star Wars he likes to bullseye womp rats in his T-16

"But things were verified in the end. Walter contacted me a year ago and we sorted it out. It's funny, because I never thought I'd be getting so much recognition 20 years later. Until I became aware a year or so ago of the surge in retro gaming




Phase 1 – TIE Fighter dogfight


Phase 2 – Death Star surface attack


Phase 3 – Death Star trench run

interest, and the controversy swirling around my Star Wars record, I thought everyone had forgotten about the Guinness Book scores, and that I'd never again hear anything about them."

The doubt over the validity of the score seems odd, as it was achieved at an official tournament with recognised witnesses, and David was certainly not a stranger to these events.

"I played Star Wars in the tournaments of three years. In the first in 1984, I failed, in that I didn't get the high score. Part of the reason for this was that I had to drive four hours to get to the nearest participating arcade, and was tired when I got there and had less than one day to play [NB: the tournament was held over a three-day period]. Fortunately, in the next two years, there were local arcades participating around 30 miles away from my home – The Game Room in 1985 and Bally's Aladdin's Castle in 1986, both in the Sacramento, California area. In the 1985 tournament, I got the high score for Star Wars of 15 million, and the next year I got 31 million.

"Did I expect to beat my own record? Well, yeah, but I was surprised how far I got. My basic goal was to beat my previous year's score by a few million, maybe getting something over 20 million. Based on the practice scores I was getting, where I would play till I took one hit, then extrapolate to what I thought I could get on six shields, I was only expecting to get into the 20 million bracket. So I definitely excelled myself that day, although I figure that an even higher score is possible. With enough practice, and enough rolls of the dice, I figure I might have eventually hit 40 or even 50 million with six shields. However, I also think that is probably about the limit to what is possible – once in a while, taking a hit in the 'trench' sequence appears to be unavoidable."

Use the Force?

Whilst Star Wars has no obvious tricks or cheats, and using the 'Force' is not really relevant in tournament setting, can he pass on any tips to aspiring players?

"Yeah, three – practice, practice, practice. When I was trying to master a videogame, I'd spend hundreds and hundreds of dollars. It wasn't cheap. I probably spent $300 on Star Wars. And that's in quarters."

There's certainly no substitute for time and money, but David did produce a strategy guide for Star Wars, which sadly never got printed. However, one guide that *did* make it to print was for the UK's favourite retro game, as voted for by you…

"There was this contest in the States on a British computer game called Elite to see who could make it to 'elite' status first. I won it, so they asked me to do a strategy guide, which got published by this Pennsylvanian company called Cheatsheet Products. It sold about 2,000 copies, mainly here in the States, I think. Hey, I'll send you a copy…"

And we at *Retro Gamer* will share it, we assure him. David's love of Elite fits in logically with his preferred genre of game – which explains why during the 1985 tournament he also notched up high scores on Empire Strikes Back, Battlezone, Firefox, Red Baron and Star Rider.

"My speciality is first-person games – games that put your perspective in the driver's seat or cockpit, rather than the more common arrangement in videogames where you're looking down at your player. I'm interested in simulations, and in the sort of skills that are involved in driving or piloting real-world vehicles, whether it's race cars or tanks or jet fighters or whatever."

And he does think his Star Wars skills, despite ruling for two decades, will soon be matched. "There is currently a guy who lives just 100 miles from where I live now – Brandon Erickson of Portland, Oregon – who is trying to beat my six shield high score. And I definitely think that he has the ability to do it. He has a high score of over 20 million on six shields, and the highest score he's gotten before taking a first hit is 13 million, which is actually higher than I ever did. So now I'm thinking I may have to get back in practice in order to defend my title! I haven't played it in almost 20 years, but figure I could get back in shape with a few months of play. Unfortunately, there's no local Star Wars machine I can play in an arcade, so I am considering buying one for my home, if I can find a deal that's affordable."

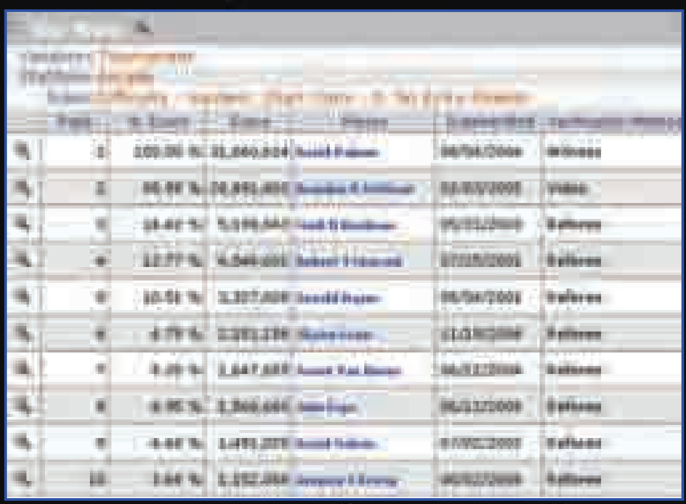
We wonder if he did get a machine at home, would he ever attempt to regain the overall Star Wars world record on factory setting – which awards bonus shields – held by Robert Mruczek, which currently stands at just over 300 million?

"Well, I can play that indefinitely, but my top score is 155 million, when I just quit. I'm not the best at Marathon games. After 20 hours, I'm wasted."

›What a piece of junk

If David Palmer wants a Star Wars machine for his home then he's going to have to pay for the privilege. The original sit-down model is generally thought to be worth between £1,500 and £2,000, although we've spoken to a collector who sold one for an amazing £5,500! The stand-up model is less desirable, but will still set you back the best part of £1,000. Of course, now is obviously not the time to buy anything *Star Wars* related, with prices driven up by the current popularity of the series. Wait until the *Episode III* excitement abates and prices will soon be back down to normal.




David Palmer tops Twin Galaxies' Star Wars tournament top 10, although Brandon Erickson is closing in fast

Tomb Raider

Imagine this for a second. Boxes and boxes of brand new 8-bit games, shrink-wrapped and ready for sale, still in storage since the mid-80s. Imagine being invited to view these boxes, and to open them up for the first time in 20 years to see what pristine games were packed inside. Imagine it? We were there!

Like a lot of articles that appear in Retro Gamer, this one began with a speculative email. When compiling last month's Retro Auction Watch, Richard Burton emailed the seller of an incredibly large retro lot. Remember the one? 50,000 games in a single auction, (although the figure was actually closer to 70,000)? Well, it turned out that the seller was Mike Fairhurst of **www.ukretro.co.uk** – visitors to last summer's Classic Gaming Expo UK may remember the UK Retro stall in the foyer of Fairfield Hall. More importantly, Mike revealed that he had an additional 150,000 new retro games in storage! Best of all, many of the boxes were still sealed. Mike himself had no idea what was in these boxes, so when he invited us to have a root through them, we jumped at the this chance.

You'll be thinking the same thing as us by this point. How did Mike acquire this mammoth retro stash? Simply really – he bought it in an eBay auction two years ago. The original seller needed to shift over a *quarter of a million* games from a warehouse in Morecambe, and Mike was the lucky bidder. Obviously this was not a huge collection of individual games – it was unsold stock from the booming 8-bit days. Boxes were branded with the publishers' names – Ocean, Software Projects, Mastertronic and the like – and each box would contain 100s of copies of the same game. So in a Software Projects box there might be 200 shrink-wrapped copies of Jet Set Willy for the Spectrum. In a Mastertronic box there might be 500 copies of Kikstart for the Commodore 64, still sealed in their blister packs.

Mike hired a seven tonne truck to pick up the stock from Morecambe and bring it back to his North Wales base. It took two



Our first glance inside the container. The stock on the left and right had been sorted, but the boxes at the back hadn't been touched until we arrived



UK Retro's Mike Fairhurst, seen here with just a small portion of his immense retro gaming stockpile





A vast collection of Atari 2600 PAL cartridge games. All of the titles were still shrink-wrapped

journeys and still there wasn't enough room to pack in all the games – he had to leave 5,000 games in the car park outside the warehouse! But then what difference does 5,000 make when you've got over 250,000, right? The stock was packed into a series of lock-up containers and he's been chipping away at it ever since, selling individual games on his UK Retro site and shifting larger quantities on eBay. Half of the stock has now gone, but there's still 150,000 games looking for a good home. And as we mentioned, it was anyone's guess as to what titles remained…

Opening the vault

This article's title may be a little overdramatic, but it really was a venture into the unknown. Mike opened the container door and sunlight flooded in, revealing a wall of boxes packed from the wooden floor to the metal roof. Dust hung heavy in the air and a few cobwebs had to be brushed aside as we entered.

The boxes were stacked eight foot high by eight foot wide, and Mike guessed that the back wall of the container was a good 20 foot away. That's over 1,200 cubic feet of preserved retro goodness! Camera in hand, we took a few snaps of the undisturbed scene before getting stuck in. One by one, the boxes were carried out of the container and carefully opened. The first batch of boxes contained PAL Atari 2600 games – titles like Centipede, Defender and Missile Command. Cartridge games were in the minority though, as the next 100 or so boxes all contained 8-bit tape games. There was lots of unsold Software Projects stock – Manic Miner and Jet Set Willy on a huge variety of formats – and many Ocean-branded boxes, containing games like Hunchback II for the C64 and The Great Escape for the Spectrum. Melbourne House titles were popular too, with boxes of The Lord of the Rings adventure game (with the bundled paperback book, of course) and War in Middle Earth.

However, the most popular publisher in evidence was Mastertronic. Many boxes were blazoned with the memorable Mastertronic logo (and the rather ironic strap line, "The Fastest Moving Software"), and they contained 1,000s of budget titles, many still in their blister packs and some even with Toys R' Us barcodes attached. Mastertronic's decision to support the MSX in the UK looked like an expensive mistake, as there were





Boxes of Melbourne House's Tolkien games, all for the Amstrad CPC

piles and piles of unsold stock for the format.

While there were many Mastertronic games, just about every other 8-bit publisher was represented. There were titles from Atari, Imagine, Elite, Bug-Byte, US Gold, A&F Software, New Generation Software, Virgin Software, Firebird and many, many more. There were some 16-bit titles too, with games for the Amiga, Atari ST and PC. It really was like an Aladdin's cave, and because you often didn't know what was inside each box, opening the 101st box was just as exciting as opening the very first.

Buried treasure

The afternoon whizzed past and we eventually had as stop due to poor light. The rear of the





Software Projects' boxes overflowing with copies of Jet Set Willy 2 for the MSX and Dragon's Lair for the Spectrum



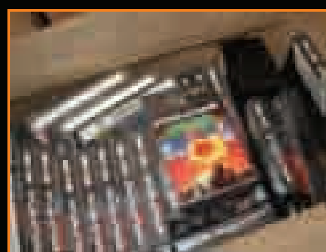


While 95% of the stock was for 8-bit machines, there were a few boxes packed with 16-bit titles

container was now visible, but there were many boxes still stacked up on the right-hand side. It then dawned on use that we'd only opened perhaps half of the boxes. What other treasures were yet to be discovered? Mike remembers boxes full of Ultimate software when he originally loaded the lorry, including one with copies of Cyberrun spilling out, but we were unable to find them again. Maybe another time...

Mike's plan is to search through the rest of the stock and sell it through his website, with occasional lots appearing on eBay UK (his User ID is *fairziff*). If you're looking for original shrink-wrapped titles, many of them rare, your first port of call should be **www.ukretro.co.uk**.





100s of copies of Hunchback II for the C64, and a small box of BBC Micro games from A&F Software





Shrinkwrapped games from a various Liverpudlian publishers including Bug-Byte, Software Projects and Imagine

Win! Win! Win 100 retro games!

Mike kindly provided us with a box packed with games (mainly from Mastertronic), all still sealed in their original blister packs. The titles are for a wide variety of 8-bit formats, and here are just some of the titles that are included:

- Knight Tyme (Spectrum)
- Trailblazer (Commodore 64)
- Stormbringer (MSX)
- BMX Racers (Commodore 16)
- Joe Blade II (Amstrad)
- The Last V8 (Commodore 64)
- Tutti Fruiti (Commodore 16)
- Impossible Mission (Spectrum)
- Countdown to Meltdown (Commodore 64)
- Beach Head (Amstrad)





To be in with a chance of bagging all 100 games (or one of 20 runners-up prizes of a single title), simply answer this question:

Mastertronic's £2.99 label was called MAD. What did MAD stand for?

To enter, either fill in the online competition form at **www.retrogamer.net**, or send your answer on a postcard to: 100 Games Competition, Retro Gamer, Live Publishing, Europa House, Adlington Park, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK10 4NP, UK. **Closing date Friday 27th May 2005**. Editor's decision is final. Competition open to UK residents only.

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

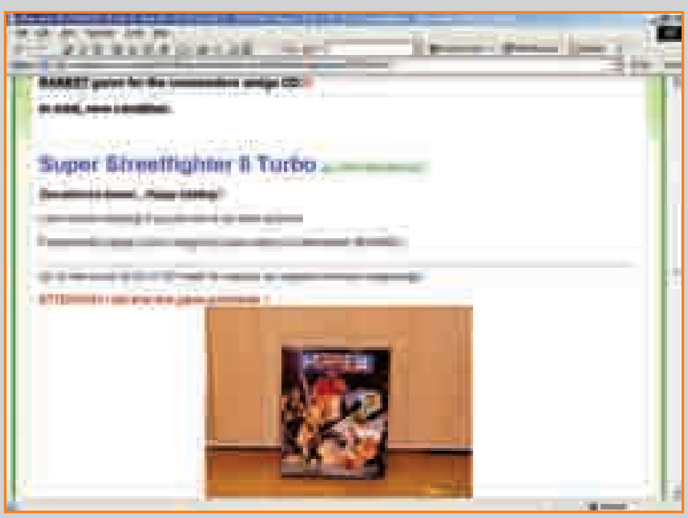
Richard Burton takes another sideways glance at some of the online auctions that have twinkled through the myriad of cheap tat like a two carat diamond stuck in a cowpat

If you're an owner of the Amiga CD32 console and have an intense hankering for some rare gaming fodder then sit tight my friends, as you've picked a good month to wander around the vast untamed plains of eBay. Not one, but two highly prized gaming offerings were available to add to your retro gaming collection this month.

First up is an auction proclaiming to have the rarest Amiga CD32 game ever released. The rare game in question was Super Street Fighter II Turbo, and the auction was listed in the otherwise MSX-strewn backwoods of eBay Netherlands. Produced by Capcom and Gametek, and released in 1995, SSFII Turbo is considered by collectors to be one of the hardest games to find on the system, and one of the rarest Street Fighter games full stop. The final price tag certainly matched up to the auction description with a remarkable final winning bid of just over £278.

OK, so it might be considered rare and would most definitely require a public wealth warning to be declared on your bank balance should you want to shell out for a copy of it. But stepping out from the shadows arrives a new challenger to the title of rarest and most expensive Amiga CD32 game. Ladies and Gentlemen, please doff your cap for the new undisputed Amiga CD32 champion of the world… Xenon 2: Megablast.

Widely regarded to be one of the best shoot-em-ups for the CD32, the one enormous advantage (depending on your musical tastes) it has over virtually every other game is the real music soundtrack it has pumping away throughout the game. Featuring several 80s dance/house music artists such as Bomb The Bass, S-Express and Betty Boo (no doubt still doing the do), combined with the a 3D sound system produced by synthesiser experts Roland, it provided some of the best in-game musical accompaniment and sound effects heard in a game up to that point. And if that wasn't enough to get your glow-stick throbbing there's also the fact that the legendary programming team of the Bitmap Brothers was responsible for the coding. A gaming great and a collectable rolled into one.



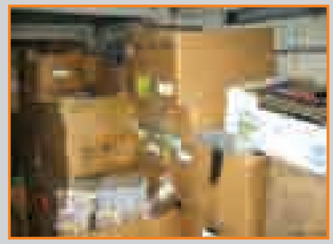
The rarest game for the CD32. Maybe not, but it still commands a high price when put under the virtual hammer

So, game playing pop-pickers, for the privilege of having a cracking shooter as well as a nostalgic dance soundtrack to boot, you would have to delve your hand in your copiously filled pockets and dog out £340. Damn impressive.

Retro stash

The largest and most jaw-dropping, eye-popping, drool-encrusted auction to be seen for a considerable time must be the one listed by eBay seller Fairziff, retro games dealer extraordinaire. Fairziff runs the **www.ukretro.co.uk** website which sells mostly new and unused games for most 8-bit systems. With an enormous amount of back stock, and lock-up space at a premium, he felt it was time to start thinning out his collection somewhat…

The resulting lot is the stuff of dreams to games players and retro hoarders alike. The auction listing estimated that there were approximately 50,000 games up for sale in this one colossal gaming mountain, although this was considered to be very conservative and the actual figure was likely to be nearer the 70,000



How much retro can you handle? There were up to 70,000 games in the lot, and many of them were still shrink-swapped

mark as, and quite understandably, an exact stock take hadn't taken place.

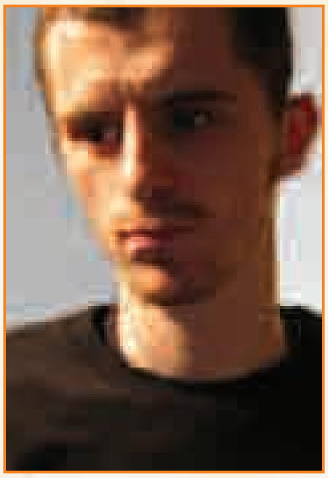
Amongst this humungous offering were full boxes of Jet Set Willy in Software Projects shipping cases, piles of Mastertronic and Hit Squad titles, sealed cases of Melbourne House and Ocean games, just about anything you would want to begin a collection or enough stock to potentially start-up a retro business.

So what price for such a gargantuan lot? Well, with this sort of auction opportunity appearing once in a blue moon the bidding was strangely controlled up until the very last few minutes when it kicked off big time. The mad and frenetic buyers all jumped in at the same time causing a massive price hike of £2,000 in the last four minutes alone. When time ran out and the dust finally settled the final bid price came to rest at an extremely nice £3,600.

Granted, that does indeed sound a lot of money to spend on a few old games but when you take into account what could be potentially 70,000 pieces of software, you're looking at a very reasonable average of just five pence a game. The postage costs might be a tad pricey however.

http://Retro

David Crookes searches the Web for Amstrad CPC resources and bumps into Malc Jennings, webmaster of CPC Zone



CPC Zone is easily one of the best Amstrad sites on the Web. It looks great, the content is regularly updated, there's a lively forum, and it attracts some of the best names associated with the CPC scene.

With masses of information to trawl through, its success is hardly surprising. There are in-depth, unbiased reviews of virtually every game ever released for the CPC, along with screenshots, box art, music downloads, mobile phone wallpapers and masses of cheats. Best of all, game information is easily accessible via the site's 'Gamebase' section. Simply type in the name of a game and the database instantly returns results. There are currently over 2,000 games in the database, so you can be 99% sure that the title you're looking for is included.

We dragged ourselves away from the site to chat to its creator, Malc Jennings…

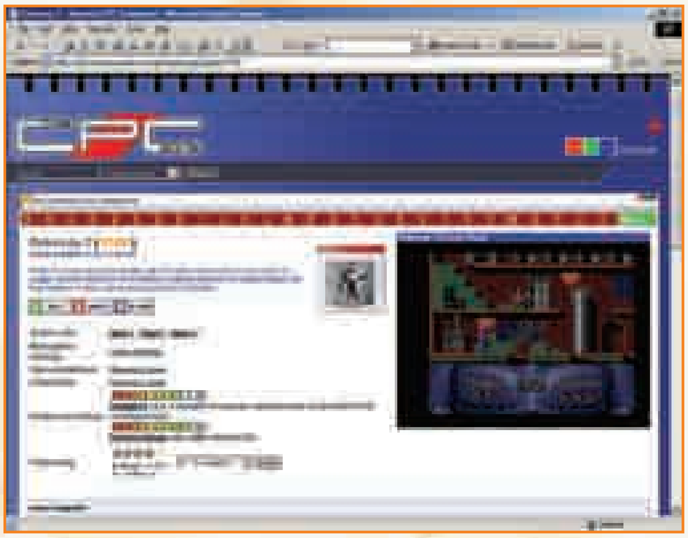
Retro Gamer: CPC Zone began life in the Summer of 2001, years after the 8-bit computer market died. Why did you set it up?

Malc Jennings: The Amstrad CPC 464 was my first ever home computer and I've always have a soft spot for it. I think most of us feel the same way about the first machine we ever owned. But after giving away my 464 to my cousin and then watching him give it to some girl up the street, I always wanted to play those old classics again. The only way of doing that was via emulation. I searched Google for CPC sites and noticed that only three or four of the results had actually been updated recently – the rest of them had been sitting there for years without any major updates. The retro-kid inside me came to the surface and I spent the next few weeks designing CPC Zone.

RG: What were you hoping the site would become?

MJ: From day one I was looking for things that had not previously been available in the CPC community, such as classic gaming scans, commercial materials, advertisements and downloads other than the games themselves. I had a good look around communities designed for other systems such as the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64. Those sections which had never been covered or simply overlooked in the CPC community were quickly added to CPC Zone.

The site really couldn't open with just a handful of pages and a news section. I knew that if this was going to make any impact at all then I was going to have to offer something that would keep bringing visitors back. So we initially launched with a reviews section that covered around 50-60 titles, and having scanned a large amount of cassette inlays that I had bought via eBay, we also uploaded around 80 scans.



Looking for information on an old CPC game? Malc's Gamebase provides quick and easy access to 1,000s of titles

RG: How has CPC Zone evolved since its launch?

MJ: The site has moved away from static HTML pages and CGI scripts to a new design written entirely in PHP. This makes updating the site much easier than before and has allowed us to add the many new sections and features you see on the site today. We also have some great members and contributors who have provided content. Everyone who has contributed to the site has his or her name in our credits section in the form of a high-score table.

RG: Did you feel the CPC was being under-represented on the Web with much of the focus on the Spectrum and C64?

MJ: There are lots of great websites out there for other machines – World of Spectrum for the Sinclair and Lemon64 for the Commodore 64, to name just two. People seem to forget the Amstrad when they talk about the old classics. I created CPC Zone in an attempt to bring the Amstrad to people's attention and say that this piece of kit was easily on the same level as other hardware. I certainly never expected the site to become as big as it is today.

RG: What are the site's strengths?

MJ: The main strength for me personally would be the CPC Gamebase. A version of this is already on the site, but a massively improved version is sitting on my server at home with more than 3,000 entries without any duplication.

Our cover archives are also very special to me, because they now contain over 1,000 unique entries and are being constantly updated. A lot of that content is incredibly rare, at least in an online format. Our news section is also incredibly active and is updated on a frequent basis – knowing the emulator developers and other webmasters on a personal level has certainly helped us to keep that page as up to date as possible.

RG: ... and any weaknesses?

MJ: Our review section could seriously do with more content, although we currently host around 600 reviews.

RG: Tell us more about Gamebase.

MJ: Gamebase is basically the CPC gaming version of the IMDB website. It runs from a huge database containing just about every single Amstrad CPC game ever released. Each game then has its own specific page containing the game title, year of release, genre, publishers, programmers, musicians, graphics team, production team, number of players, controls, cover artwork, cheats, reviews, reader ratings, screenshots, promotional material, documentation, and a comparison between other formats with screenshots of the Spectrum, C64 and CPC versions side by side.

RG: Phew! What's the aim?

MJ: The overall aim is to give every single CPC title a page on the Internet and allow people to discover more about that game they once played back in 1987, or that musician that wrote the music for Back To The Future, or the artist that created the loading screens for Robocop, or the software team that brought that game to you in the first place. This has taken around six months of development time so far.

RG: How much time do you spend maintaining the site?

MJ: I spend the occasional hour or two maintaining CPC Zone. Having said that, I have spent over 10 hours per day creating new content for the site. The Gamebase project alone has occupied a very large amount of my free time and been the cause of many red eyes in the morning.

RG: Do you get a lot of help?

MJ: I have a voluntary news team that help out with posting the occasional snippet of news that might otherwise be missed. They also moderate our forums and issue warnings when people step over the very faint boundaries that we have in place. So that helps me relax more.

RG: Does the site make money?

MJ: No, CPC Zone is non-profit and is maintained as a hobby more than anything else. Any money that we spend, sadly comes out of my back pocket. I've noticed that sites such as Lemon 64 have a shop that allows you to purchase coffee mugs and t-shirts with the site logo and game sprites on them. It's something that I would definitely be interested in looking at, providing the demand from our visitors was there.

RG: What can Retro Gamer readers do to help with the site?

MJ: Mainly visit the site, enjoy it, join our forums and meet other ex-CPC owners. If anyone has any Amstrad games which are not listed in our cover archives then please do contact us and scan them. I also need to find more Amstrad developers or software houses from that generation to boost our interview archive.

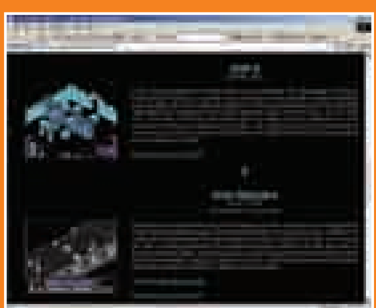
RG: What site updates are you looking to introduce in the future?

MJ: More downloadable items are in the pipeline, including skins for the Xbox port of the CPC emulator Arnold. However, the main update for me in the future is to launch Gamebase 2.

CPC Zone is located at www.amstradcpc.com.

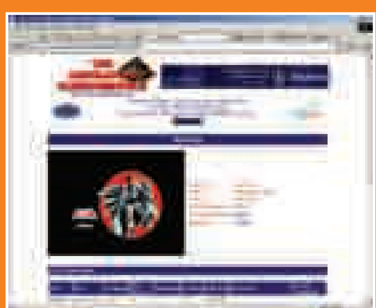
Recommended Amstrad CPC sites

CPC Game Reviews



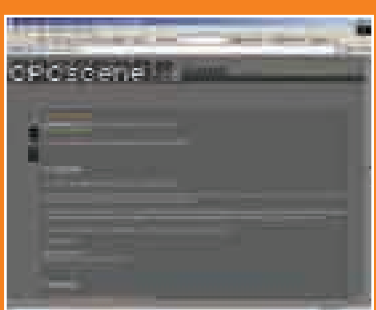
www.cpcgamereviews.com
If you're looking for CPC reviews then this site is brilliant. It features 100s of reviews, all of which are well-written and comprehensive. They come complete with screenshots, and new reviews are added regularly. All credit to the webmaster, Nicholas Campbell.

The Amstrad CPC Games Resource



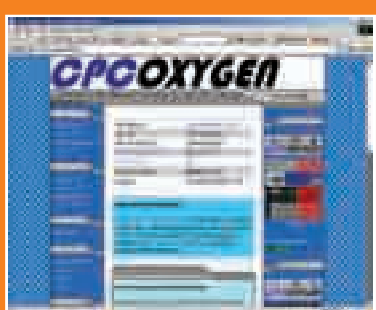
http://tacgr.emuunlim.com
So you own a game on tape or disk but you want to emulate it on your PC... There's no better place for Amstrad CPC game downloads than this. The site has many 100s of commercial games to play and enjoy, plus more recently released homebrew titles.

CPC Scene



www.cpcscene.com
Very much a niche, specialist site which offers downloads of non-commercial stuff. There are demos, music and games to download with the site's authors encouraging uploading of new apps too. Not a site for the casual retro gamer, but nevertheless worthwhile for CPC fans.

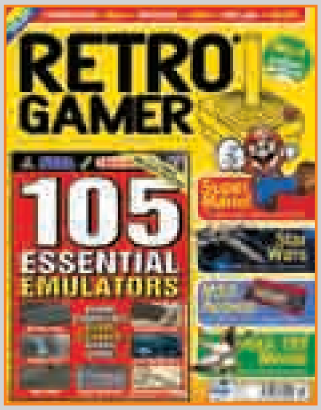
CPC Oxygen



http://cpcoxygen.digi-alt.net
It's not the most regular of CPC online magazines but the next issue is always something to look forward to. The magazine offers well-written articles and great insights into the Amstrad scene. Worth a look. The site is also home to a growing archive of Amstrad Action covers.

The Retro Forum

Have your say... Send us a letter or make yourself heard on the forum



Awww, nuts!

I've just seen the cover of *Retro Gamer* issue 14 (the Atari 7800/Street Fighter II one). I like the magazine and have bought most of the previous 13 issues (and bought two issues of number three).

I have a concern about the dropping of the word 'Acorn' from the front of the magazine over the past two issues. Please could you adjust the top of the front cover so that it includes the term Acorn as well. I understand that the BBC Micro, Atom, RISCPC, Electron and Archimedes will not feature as often as other more gaming-dominated systems, but the word Acorn on the front cover would at least reassure me that the Acorn systems will have some coverage in the future. It makes a big difference, at least to this reader.
Alicia, via email

RG: Thanks for the input Alicia, and we're sorry if we caused you any concern. The main reasons for the small change on the cover is strictly down to the magazine's appeal, and has no bearing on Acorn coverage inside. Quite simply, the Acorn brand isn't as recognised in some regions (*Retro Gamer* is distributed worldwide). We have no plans to change the cover, but don't panic, as this doesn't mean that we're going to ignore your favourite systems. In fact, we may be planning a feature on the Acorn Archimedes in the near future.

Most haunted

Hi guys. I have wrote to you before but I understand you must get 100s of emails each month and you can only print so many. I'm writing really for two reasons – firstly, to congratulate you on the new and improved magazine. I have subscribed to your magazine since issue four, and I love every bit of it, from it being dropped through my letterbox to reading it from cover to cover and playing the coverdisc. Please keep up the good work.

I also wanted to bring to your attention this little gem I found on eBay: **http://cgi.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewItem&category=62054&item=8176591365&rd=1&ssPageName=WDVW**. While it looks like a normal NES, the seller claims it is haunted by the previous owner who had passed away before he bought it from a thrift shop! I was totally amazed by this machine and especially the questions asked by potential buyers.

While the seller would only ship within the US I would love to know if he is telling the truth. I would love to hear your views on this.
Dominic, via email

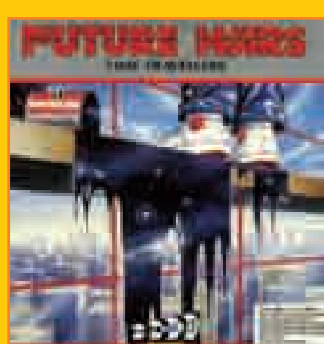
RG: Jinkies! Thanks for your letter Dominic, and the heads up on the supernatural Nintendo. We've had a look at the auction and agree, it does sound

http://from.the.retro.forums

This month on the forums we asked you what classic games you would like to see remade on the Nintendo DS and the Sony PSP. Here's what you had to say...

ID: >Retrology<

I would jump out my chair and head to the software shop if Future Wars was remade for Nintendo's DS system. I played Future Wars on my Amiga years ago and I have not felt the same atmosphere from a game since. Class from start to finish (great end sequence too and with the touch screen technology of Nintendo's new handheld it could be a 'touch and click' adventure.

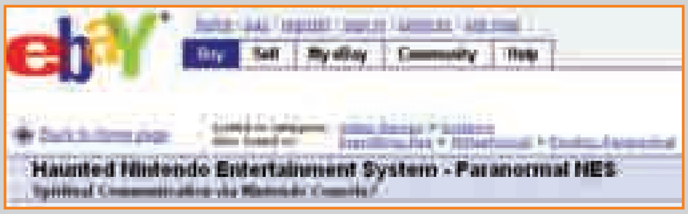


ID: >Officer Dibble<

I'm bit of a puzzle game fan, with many hours spent on Kula World, Devil Dice, Nobody Can Stop Mr Domino and Kurushi Final Mental Block. If I had to choose just one then it'd have to be Kula World. So many days, weeks and months have been spent on that classic and it would suit the PSP down to the ground.

As for the DS it would have to be Rocket Robot On Wheels, which probably sold no more than a dozen copies when it was released on the N64. It was a superb gem of a game and deserves to be appreciated by more gamers.





fascinating, although try as we might, we couldn't quite make out that face one potential buyer found in the photo! Look at it this way though – claim you have a haunted NES for sale and it goes for $225, whereas a spirit-free, second-hand NES would go for a fraction of that amount. Someone's definitely laughing, and they're probably of this world…

Save Our Software!

Over the past day or so I have used a transfer cable and a copy of Star Commander to back up my Commodore 64 disks to my PC to safeguard their future. I was shocked to discover just how fragile the data had become on the decaying media, some of which are now beyond salvation. Luckily, the rare and one-off stuff was transferred without trouble and copied to CD-ROMs as a matter of priority.

My conclusion is this – if you have old disks at home which are rare or beloved then please, please look into the possibilities of PC archiving as soon as you can. Look on eBay for transfer equipment or be damned! It is so easy to say you'll leave it for next month, but a month is all it takes for a half-gone disk to be completely shot. PC games are easy to back-up, just fit a second-hand 5.25in floppy drive. A C64 parallel-serial cable can be cheaply made by following simple instructions found on many hobby websites. Doubtless BBC Micro or Spectrum data transfer is equally simple.

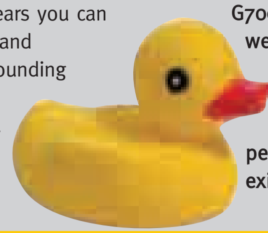
Michael Braisher, via email

RG: We echo your plea Michael. Magnetic media, although once touted as a lifetime data storage solution, much as CDs and DVDs are today, is far from perfect, and is in fact, a very fragile and risky way of storing data. Your letter has prompted us to look into the methods of backing-up old media, and we'll hopefully have a article on the subject soon.

Splash!

Just a quick email to say that if you put your head under the water in the bath, and then press certain parts of your ears you can create Speccy and Commodore sounding noises. Great magazine, too.

Mark, via email



G-Force

I just got a copy of issue 14 and I've read an email regarding the Phillips G7000 (Magnavox Odyssey 2). I'm glad I'm not the only person who had one. My mother thought it would be better than the Atari VCS because it had a keyboard. It was my first videogame system back in '79/80.

An article covering this console is well overdue, especially since it was the follow up to the Magnavox Odyssey, the first ever cartridge-based videogame console. Didn't Magnavox sue Atari for using cartridges on the VCS? It was also the first (and only?) programmable videogame system. You could design your own mazes in Munchkin (a superior Pac-Man clone) and, with the Computer Programmer cartridge, actually write very simple programs. It would be great to see this overlooked system covered in your magazine very soon.

Andrew Wilkinson, via email

RG: Yep, it looks as though the G7000 has got its fans, and we've had a fair few emails on the subject since last month. The G7000 is indeed an obscure system, with many people totally unaware of its existence. As advocates of all things retro, we'd like to change this, so rest assured, we'll hopefully be covering this great little system in a future issue.

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Macclesfield
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Fist of the NorthStar

I need some help finding the value of an old computer that I rescued from a skip behind a

ID: >Knight if NI<

I think the point-and-click adventure games would be great. The games I would like to see are Maniac Mansion, Monkey Island, Simon the Sorcerer and Full Throttle.



ID: >kaptain_von<

If a decent conversion of Turok: Rage Wars was released for the DS I would be very happy. OK, it was not as good as Goldeneye but it had bot support which meant you could play and practice deathmatches without the need for three mates to be present. Yet with wireless support you have the ability to link up with other players when you wanted to. As for the PSP, a handheld version of the puzzle game Ballistic would be ideal for whiling away time on trains, as I found it horribly addictive and puzzle games seem to work remarkably well on handhelds.

ID: >king monkey<

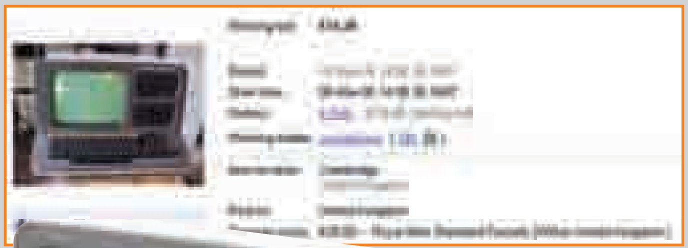
For the DS it would have to be a remake of N64 Goldeneye. The multiplayer using wi-fi would be fantastic, especially with more than four players, and trying to figure out who you are playing against in a public place would add an extra element to the game. Fingers crossed then.



ID: >Pottyboy<

I would love to see Another World and its sequel, Heart Of The Alien (which was never released in Europe) in one collection, the Phantasmagoria series, the Wing Commander games, Stunt Car Racer, Half-Life, Unreal (the first of the well known FPS series), all the Alien Breeds and Superfrog… all on the PSP!

Not even considering a DS. The PSP looks and sounds well cool even if





factory due to be demolished, as I cannot really find much information on the Net about it. So, I was wondering if you could help me. It is a NorthStar Advantage from around 1981, and it is the model that has had one of its 5.25in drives replaced with a 5Mb hard disk. And, it also has 'Pacific Scientific' logos on the front of it.
Chris Freeman, via email

RG: We think we've tracked down the system you have. NorthStar (originally called Kentucky Fried Computer, oddly enough) produced the NorthStar system as an alternative to the IBM PC. A large, clunky, terminal-style system, it boasted a high resolution display (640x240), a Z80 CPU running at 3.5Mhz, 64Kb of RAM (expandable to 256Kb), 32Kb VRAM, built-in sound and two drive bays which could hold either 5.25in floppy drives, or 5-20Mb hard disks. The units originally sold for around $4,000!

Sadly though, it's not really worth much nowadays. A quick check on eBay revealed an Advantage recently sold for £31.20. Ah well, it's still an impressive piece of computing history.

DIY arcade

Spurred on by your excellent feature on building your own arcade cabinet, I finally decided to attempt my own project. Unfortunately I do not have the space to house a full size arcade cabinet and did not have sufficient funds to build a decent cocktail cabinet. I therefore settled on a custom built arcade-style control panel.

My goal was to build the controls in a similar configuration to the classic Williams games of the early 80s as these were the games I enjoyed most whilst growing up. After many different designs and prospective ideas I decided that it would be ideal if I could build a hybrid controller compatible with the Sony PlayStation console as I already owned the Williams Arcade Classics and Midway Collection 2 discs which included all the games I wanted to play. A point to note is that both these PSX discs include functions to assign key configurations for each game across both one and two player controller ports, as well as a key combination to gain access to the original arcade cabinet operator menus, thus making the whole experience just like owning the original arcade cabinets and configuring the excellent Robotron to use the two sticks as in the arcades.

It's also worth mentioning that the newer release of Midway Arcade Treasures for the PS2 is NOT compatible with digital controllers and key configuration is not included. I am not sure that the operator menu access is intact either. This is a crying shame as in my opinion the only way to relive these original games is via arcade 'digital' controls. I also wanted to use the controller for other digital controller compatible PSX games, which include the many import shooters I have collected over the years. Using an IPAC interface for the PC would have made it easy to connect to a PC and use MAME to relive those old games, but this was unsuitable for a PSX.

Then I remembered that I had bought a Twin Arcade Stick made by Skream for the PSX many years back. This was a monster-sized two-player controller that was buried somewhere in the loft. Once I had dismantled the Skream stick I found that the internals could be disassembled and reused for my project.

The Skream stick used pretty poor quality components and these would be junked in favour of brand new sticks and buttons from Ultimarc. However the two PCBs (Printed Circuit Boards) inside were just what I needed to interface the new components to the PSX.

My Father and I set about cutting out a mock top panel made from stiff cardboard and



the battery life doesn't last long enough for some (it will last long enough for me!).

ID: >jwdvd<

I would love to see Blast Corps on the DS. You could control the vehicles using the touch pad and view the carrier on the top screen. Also Pilotwings would be good – two views at once, and again having the ability to control the crafts using the pad would be amazing. I also can't wait to play a Zelda game on the DS – imagine being able to switch weapons without pausing the game and being able to see the map at the same time as playing. That's gonna be fantastic.



As for the PSP, nothing really jumps out at me in the way of innovation. I'm looking forward to a Street Fighter II game that uses all six fire buttons and the PSP's massive screen. Other conversions that would be good would be Grand Theft Auto, Extreme G, Resident Evil (real time, none of this turn-based Metal Gear Acid crap), Destruction Derby and a great version of ISS Pro.

ID: >hadoken<

I'd love to see a version of Mario Kart that surpasses the SNES original. Let's hope the new one cuts the mustard.

ID: >The Analog Kid<

If I had to choose one N64 game for the DS it would have to be Pilotwings. If there is any justice in the world, Nintendo will be planning it right now! As for the PSP, I would have to choose either the original PlayStation version of Tomb Raider (not the variety of rubbish sequels) or Jumping Flash, the only game I know of where you are in control of a giant mechanical rabbit. Brilliant!

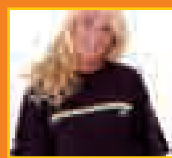
ID: >Kuang<

I'd still like to see a decent handheld version of Stunt Car Racer – the similar title on the Tapwave Zodiac really doesn't cut it. Hopefully the venerable Mr Crammond will consider this if the mooted sequel ever surfaces.

I'm still surprised that nobody seems to be considering a Gauntlet remake, especially given

Star Letter

Want to grab yourself a quality piece of retro-gaming merchandise? Each month we'll select our favourite letter – one that makes us smile or think – and the winner can select one of our retro-themed t-shirts for free…

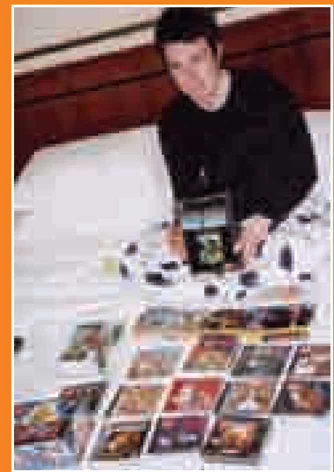


G.Ladd tidings

I would just like to thank *Retro Gamer* for the excellent Big In Japan article. I just returned from holiday in Japan and if it wasn't for your great feature I would have never ventured from the neon streets of Tokyo. But thanks to your intrepid reporting I caught the Bullet Train down to Osaka and all the great treasures I uncovered with your help more than covered the massive ticket price (£120 return if you're wondering!).

My most treasured item out of all the many rarities I bought that day must be the mint condition copy of Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake for the MSX that I spotted in a cabinet in Super Potato 7. Mine for the bargain basement price of £50! A close second would be the Mega Drive Modem, boxed, complete and in perfect shape and only £5! Not to mention several very rare Mega-CD games including Fahrenheit which was half the price of the copy I'd seen in the Tokyo branch. With so many great finds my only problem now is trying to find somewhere to put them all!

Gareth Ladd, via email



RG: That's quite a collection of bargains you've landed there! We're pleased to see that Jonti Davies' article has helped you track down some Japanese bargains, and it's stories like this that make all the hard slog we put into the magazine seem worthwhile.

While it certainly won't cover your Japanese travel expenses, have a *Retro Gamer* t-shirt on us.

mounted the new buttons and sticks to ascertain the necessary spacing and measurements. Next we built a box from MDF and painted it, connecting the top panel with a piano hinge to hold up the panel when servicing the wiring or components. The overlay and labels are the most unsuccessful parts of the build and in hindsight I would have done them differently. The chrome effect contact paper used as an overlay reacted a bit with the MDF paint and generated some bubbles that were impossible to remove. However, once under a Perspex top plate they are just about passable. The silver tape dymo labels are purely functional and not particularly aesthetically pleasing but they do at least help decipher what button does what. Finally, the top panel was finished with some plastic edging to tidy it all up.

I now have an arcade-style control panel that enables me to play my favourite games with the buttons in the correct orientation, which is something I have been after for years.

Currently I am building new versions of the controller for friends who are also keen to get the original arcade experience without the expense and impracticability of owning the actual arcade machine. These later revisions are going to use authentic control panel overlays and IPAC interfaces for use with a PC and MAME. They will look 10 times better and be a great deal smaller than the PSX prototype but hey, you've got to start somewhere, right?

Tony Redpath, via email

RG: That's some sterling work you've done there Tony – great job! Playing classic arcade games from the likes of Midway on authentic controllers is the best way to relive a misspent youth, and with your custom built arcade controller, we're sure that you're in arcade heaven. And, if this is your first try at building you own controller, then we can't wait to see your upcoming efforts.

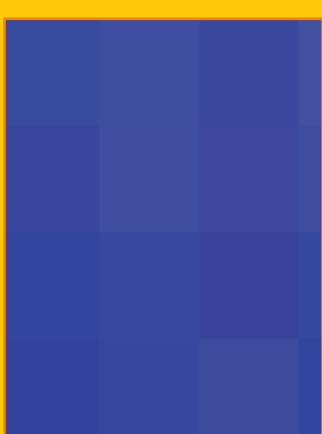
Second hand Zelda

Last week I bought Zelda: A Link To The Past (SNES) from a little second hand shop in Chorley. Can you ask 'Scot' and 'Idiot' if I can delete their saved games and start again. Thanks very much.

Rich, via email

RG: Er, Scot and Idiot, can Rich please delete your save games so he can start again? Cheers.

the multiplayer abilities of the DS. In fact, a lot of games from that era could do with a reworking – maybe a multiplayer compilation would be in order?

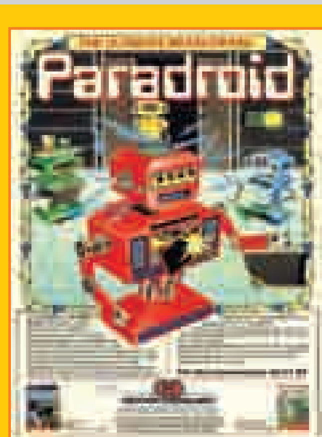


ID: >readboy<

I'd like to see a conversion of Sega Saturn's Panzer Dragoon for the DS. It's a great 3D shooter, atmospheric with a certain artistic style and moody soundtrack. The DS's touch screen would be perfect for targeting and maybe a voice option for firing.

ID: >benaffleckiscool<

I'd like to see a version of Sensible Soccer where, on your own DS, you would always be shooting up the screen. Failing that, Micro Machines games are always fun for a bit of a multiplayer session.



ID: >retro-planet.com<

I'd have to go with a port of Zombies Ate My Neighbours from the SNES, just for the originality of gameplay and huge injection of humour. It was multiplayer so link play would be great for seeing off those pesky aliens. Also C64 Paradroid on the DS. You could have action at the top and the map at the bottom to show where those elevator shafts are. You could also use the touch pad for the upgrade/transfer part of the game.

ID: >Sack<

I got my DS yesterday with the intention of homebrewing on it. A friend of mine asked for Chaos – a wireless multiplayer version with the game layout on the top screen and your menus on the touch screen. That's so logical I'd never even thought of that!

Retro Coverdisc

This month's program-packed coverdisc contains over 100 emulators for your PC, making it the biggest and best emulator disc ever! Just about every format is catered for, from the Oric Atmos to the Sinclair ZX80. You'll never need to search the Web for an emulator again!



step 1 Place the coverdisc into your CD/DVD drive and it should start automatically. If not, select Run from the Start menu and enter D:\browser.exe (assuming that D: is the letter of your CD/DVD drive). When the browser appears, click OK to accept the declaration.



step 2 Some of the emulators are provided as executable files and these will run or install straight from the disc. If a setup wizard appears, simply follow the onscreen prompts and then wait while the files are copied to your hard drive.



step 3 Many emulators are stored in zipped archives, so you might need an archive manager like WinZip, which is under the Utilities browser tab. Extract all the files from the archive using the Extract feature and place them in an empty folder, then run the executable file.



step 4 If you're looking for a particular emulator, click the Search button and enter a keyword. The browser program will search the disc and place all the relevant results under the left most browser tab. They can now be accessed directly from here.

Problem solving

If you're having a problem with a particular program on our coverdisc, please view the help file in the program for assistance. You might also consider visiting the website of the program author for further help. Otherwise, email **techsupport@livepublishing.co.uk**.

If you are having problems with the CD, first check that it is not dirty or scratched. CDs can be cleaned by holding them under the cold water tap and gently rubbing the silver side with a tissue. Dry it carefully with another tissue.

If the disc still doesn't work, then it may be faulty. Faulty discs should be returned to Retro Gamer, Live Publishing International Ltd, Europa House, Adlington Park, Macclesfield, Cheshire, UK, SK10 4NP. We will replace all genuinely faulty discs.

Coverdisc helpline

01625 855051

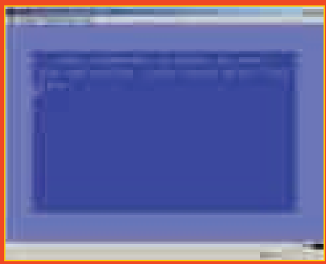
techsupport@livepublishing.co.uk

(Monday-Friday 10am-4pm)

Helpline for coverdisc problems only

DISCLAIMER

Some of the programs on the Retro Gamer disc interact with your PC on a fundamental level. We strongly advise you back up your personal data before using the disc. Due to the way the Retro Gamer disc is compiled, Retro Gamer, Live Publishing International Limited and/or any associated company and/or individual cannot take responsibility for damage to your PC or otherwise arising from use of the coverdisc. You use the programs on the disc at your own risk.



WinVICE
(Commodore 8-bit emulator)



WinUAE
(Amiga emulator)



Spectaculator
(Spectrum emulator)



Steem
(Atari ST emulator)

Acorn Emulators

Emulator Name	File Name	File Size	System	Type	Description
Archie	archie9.zip	131Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	An excellent Archimedes emulator that sadly hasnít been updated for a while
BeebEm	BeebEm14.zip	664Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The best BBC Micro emulator available. Also emulates the Master 128
B-EM	b-em061w.zip	545Kb	DOS	Freeware	A fast, DOS-based BBC Model A/B emulator
ElectrEm	ElectrEm_b9b_Windows.zip	352Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Emulate the Acorn Electron on your Windows system
Elkulator	elk03w.zip	458Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A faithful Acorn emulator that is regularly updated
Model B	modelb-dx8.zip	1,670Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	This easy to use emulator will run just about every BBC game available
Red Squirrel	RedSquirrel0.6.zip	258Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A strange name, but an excellent Acorn Archimedes emulator

Amstrad Emulators

Arnimedes	arnie10.ZIP	172Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A CPC emulator that's ideal for users with low-spec machines
Arnold	arnold27012002.zip	426Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Run the entire CPC range with this fully-featured emulator
Caprice32	cap32_361.exe	375Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	An excellent Amstrad emulator that runs all CPC games
CoPaCabana	CoPaCabana0.5.zip	278Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A CPC emulator that's much better than it may sound!
WinApe32	WinAPE_20A5b.zip	1,016Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	One of our favourite CPC emulators. Compatible with many games

Arcade Emulators

Calice32	Calice-0.5.4-update.zip	414Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A Capcom Play System emulator with support for the Neo-Geo
Callus	cls042w.zip	199Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Emulate the CPS1 machines so you can play many Capcom classics
DAPHNE	daphne-0.99.6-win32.zip	1,776Kb	Win 2000/XP	Freeware	Emulate laserdisc games on your PC. A suitable laserdisc player is required!
Kawaks	winkawaks147a.zip	494Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A Capcom arcade emulator that is regularly updated
MAME	mame094b.zip	6,973Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The original Windows command line version of MAME. Latest version
MAME Plus!	mameplus-0.91-bin.exe	7,675Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	An unofficial version of MAME with several enhanced features
MAME32	Mame32v.94_Binary.exe	5,930Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The original, and best, arcade emulator. Windows GUI version
Raine	rainew-0.42.4.zip	1,546Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A recommended alternative to MAME. Includes support for 100s of classic games

Atari Emulators

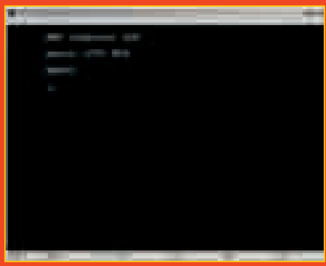
Atari++	atari++_win_1.40.zip	503Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A Windows alternative to the popular Atari800win emulator
Atari800win	atari800win_2.6c.zip	111Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Emulate the Atari 800 and other Atari 8-bit models
Handy	handy090.zip	595Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The one and only Lynx emulator. ROM file required
Jagulator	jagulator-151-win9x.zip	184Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The first available Jaguar emulator
Jum52	jum52_Win060.zip	358Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The only Windows-based Atari 5200 emulator
PaCifiST	pcst048.zip	210Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	An ST emulator which runs fine on older PCs
PCAEwin	pcaewin.zip	1,578Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	An emulator for the Atari VCS. Includes full documentation
Project Tempest	PTv0.5.zip	226Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The first Jaguar emulator to play commercial games
Steem	steem_v3_2.zip	841Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	This impressive emulator runs all of the standard ST software
StellaX	stellax-1.1.3a-win32.zip	396Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The best 2600 emulator available
v7800	v7800r12.zip	303Kb	DOS	Freeware	The only Atari 7800 emulator available. ROM files required
Virtual Super System	vss82.zip	360Kb	DOS	Freeware	The first 5200 emulator. Only runs in DOS mode
WinSTon	winston_v5.zip	651Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A popular Atari ST emulator for Windows
z26	Z26V213X.ZIP	186Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The Windows version of a very capable 2600 emulator

Commodore Emulators

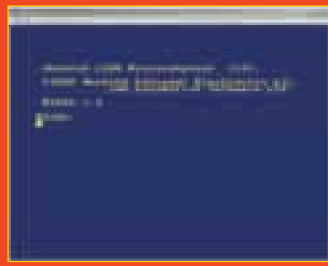
Akiko	AkikoFull_Setup.exe	7,070Kb	Windows (all)	Shareware	Use Akiko to emulate the Amiga CDTV and CD32 consoles on your PC
Artifex	Artifex029.zip	465Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	One of the newer C16/plus4 emulators. Still some work to be done
CCS64	CCS64 V3.0 Beta 1.4.zip	476Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A powerful alternative to the popular WinVICE emulator
Frodo	frodov41.zip	386Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A dedicated C64 emulator. Compatible with a huge selection of games
Minus4w	minus4w.zip	210Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A very good C16/plus4 emulator. Easy to use and supports many games
Pfau Zeh	wpfauzeh02.zip	989Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A dedicated Commodore VIC-20 emulator for Windows
WinFellow	winfellow_alpha_v043.zip	266Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A recommended alternative to the WinUAE emulator.
WinUAE	InstallWinUAE0992.exe	1,200Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The latest version of the best Amiga emulator. Amiga Kikstart ROM required
WinVICE	WinVICE-1.16.zip	3,663Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The ultimate 8-bit Commodore emulator
YAPE	yape061.zip	223Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Stands for Yet Another Plus 4 Emulator. Highly recommended

MSX Emulators

NLMSX	NLMSX.zip	1,125Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A very easy to use emulator that supports the complete MSX range
NOMSX	nomsx4f.zip	195Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Another faithful emulator from Nocash
ParaMSX	paraMSX042.zip	943Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Excellent MSX emulator that supports all of the different models
RedMSX	redmsx11.zip	619Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A new MSX emulator for Windows with lots of advanced features



Model B
(BBC Micro emulator)



Caprice32
(Amstrad CPC emulator)



ParaMSX
(MSX emulator)



Gens
(Mega Drive emulator)

Nintendo Emulators

1964	1964_099.exe	1,458Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A Nintendo 64 emulator with support for many commercial games
Blade64	Blade64_WIP5.zip	285Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	An N64 emulator with support for lots of software
Boycott Advance	ba-028.zip	636Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A very good GameBoy Advance emulator for your PC
fwNES	fwnes302.zip	867Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Claims to support more mappers than any other NES emulator
Jnes	jnes_0_5_3.exe	416Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A small, simple-to-use NES emulator. Highly recommended
Nemu64	nemu08.zip	4,740Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	One of the best N64 emulators available. This is the final version
Nesticle	nestc042.zip	192Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The first ever NES emulator. There are better alternatives now
Project64	pj64_1_4.exe	887Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	An excellent N64 emulator compatible with many commercial games
RockNES	rnes310.zip	384Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A very good NES emulator with support for many mappers
Snes9x	snes9x-1.43-win32.zip	773Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The best SNES emulator available. Plays every game tested
UltraHLE	ultrahle_v1_0.zip	172Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	For sentimental sake only – the world's first, and most infamous, N64 emulator
Virtual-E	virtuale.zip	210Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	One of the few Nintendo Virtual Boy emulators
VisualBoy Advance	VisualBoyAdvance-1.7.2.zip	598Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Without doubt the best GBA emulator available. Don't ignore it!
ZSNES	zsnesw142.zip	625Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A very impressive SNES emulator. Includes full support for Super FX games

Sega Emulators

AGES	ages030a.zip	300Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A Sega Mega Drive emulator with Mega-CD and 32X support
Dega	dega112.zip	118Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A combined Master System/Game Gear emulator for Windows
FreezeSMS	freezesmsv46.exe	1,038Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A multi-format emulator that includes support for several systems
Gens	wgens211.zip	381Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Perhaps the best Mega Drive emulator available
Kgen	kgen9804.zip	313Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	An early Mega Drive emulator that faithfully runs many games
Meka	mekaw068win.zip	606Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Considered to be the best Master System/Game Gear emulator around
Retrodrive	retroDrive4.zip	290Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	One of the newer Mega Drive emulators. Supports the 32X add-on

Sinclair Emulators

NOZX81	zx81.zip	121Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A fast, accurate ZX80/81 emulator for Windows
QLAY	qlayw090.zip	188Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A fully-featured Sinclair QL emulator for Windows PCs
RealSpectrum	RealSpectrum.zip	2,709Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	An excellent Spectrum emulator
Spec256	Sp256v12.zip	106Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A unique emulator that lets you display Spectrum games in 256 colours!
SpecEmu	specemu23.zip	182Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Another Spectrum emulator with support for several file formats
Spectaculator	Spectaculator625.exe	2,724Kb	Windows (all)	Shareware	The most advanced Spectrum emulator available
SPIN	SPIN041.zip	783Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Emulates all Spectrum models and supports many hardware features
Xtender2	XT2B13.zip	246Kb	DOS	Freeware	A simple, DOS-based ZX80/81 emulator
Z80	z80-400.zip	1,049Kb	Windows (all)	Shareware	An early but faithful Spectrum emulator
ZX32	zx32.exe	1,800Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Use this fine emulator to run 100% of Spectrum games

Misc Emulators

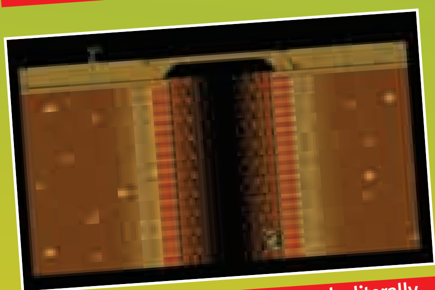
Ace32	ace32.zip	46Kb	DOS	Freeware	Emulate the Jupiter ACE on your Windows PC
AqEmu	AqEmu.zip	37Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The one and only Mattel Aquarius emulator
Bleem	demo-v1_4.zip	242Kb	Windows (all)	Demo	The infamous Bleem emulator. Requires original PlayStation CD-ROMs
CD-ICE	CD-ice.zip	168Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The only CDi emulator available. Doesn't play commercial games
Cygne	cygne21a-win.zip	98Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A working Wonderswan emulator, complete with PD game for testing purposes
DVE	dve20.exe	3,090Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Play vector-based games with this unique MB Vectrex emulator
ePSXe	epsxe160.zip	280Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The best free PlayStation emulator. ROM files required
Euphoric	SETUPEX.EXE	1,174Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Emulate the Oric-1, the Atmos and the Telestrat
EX68	EX68.zip	585Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Emulate the rare Japanese console on your Windows PC
FPSE	FPSE_009bin.zip	438Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A freeware PlayStation emulator. ROM files required
FreeDO	freedo_1_6_2.zip	1,704Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The one and only 3DO emulator
Hu6280	jak_189.zip	94Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The only free PC Engine emulator available for Windows
Koleko	koleko_vos.zip	625Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A fast, new ColecoVision emulator for your Windows PC
Magic Engine	me100-english-pr9.zip	1,220Kb	Windows (all)	Shareware	The best PC Engine emulator available, although it costs money to register
MESS	mess094b.zip	10,683Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The latest version of MESS (Multiple Emulator Super System)
NeoCD	ngcd080b.zip	507Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	The first Neo-Geo CD emulator available
NeoPocott	neopocott-038b.zip	137Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A NeoGeo Pocket Color emulator for Windows
NeoPop	NeoPop-0.71-Win32-1.06b.zip	108Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	A portable, open-source Neo-Geo Pocket Color emulator
Nostalgia	nostalgia.zip	712Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Run Intellivision games on your Windows PC
PC-Dragon II	pcd202a.zip	206Kb	Win 9x/Me	Freeware	Dragon emulator from the same author as T3
ScummVM	scummvm-0.7.0-win32.exe	1,467Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Stand-alone version of the open source adventure game emulator
T3	t3-100.zip	77Kb	Win 9x/Me	Freeware	A multi-tasking Dragon and Tandy CoCo II emulator. Requires ROM file
Virtual ColecoVision	vcol211a.zip	157Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	Emulate the ColecoVision console on your Windows system
WinX68	WinX68.zip	152Kb	Windows (all)	Freeware	An very accurate Sharp X6800 emulator. Compatible with many games

eMag

<<<Endgame>>>



Quiffy has made it to the end of the 42nd level. All he has to do is step through the final door



There's light at the end of the tunnel – literally. Quiffy quickly climbs the drain



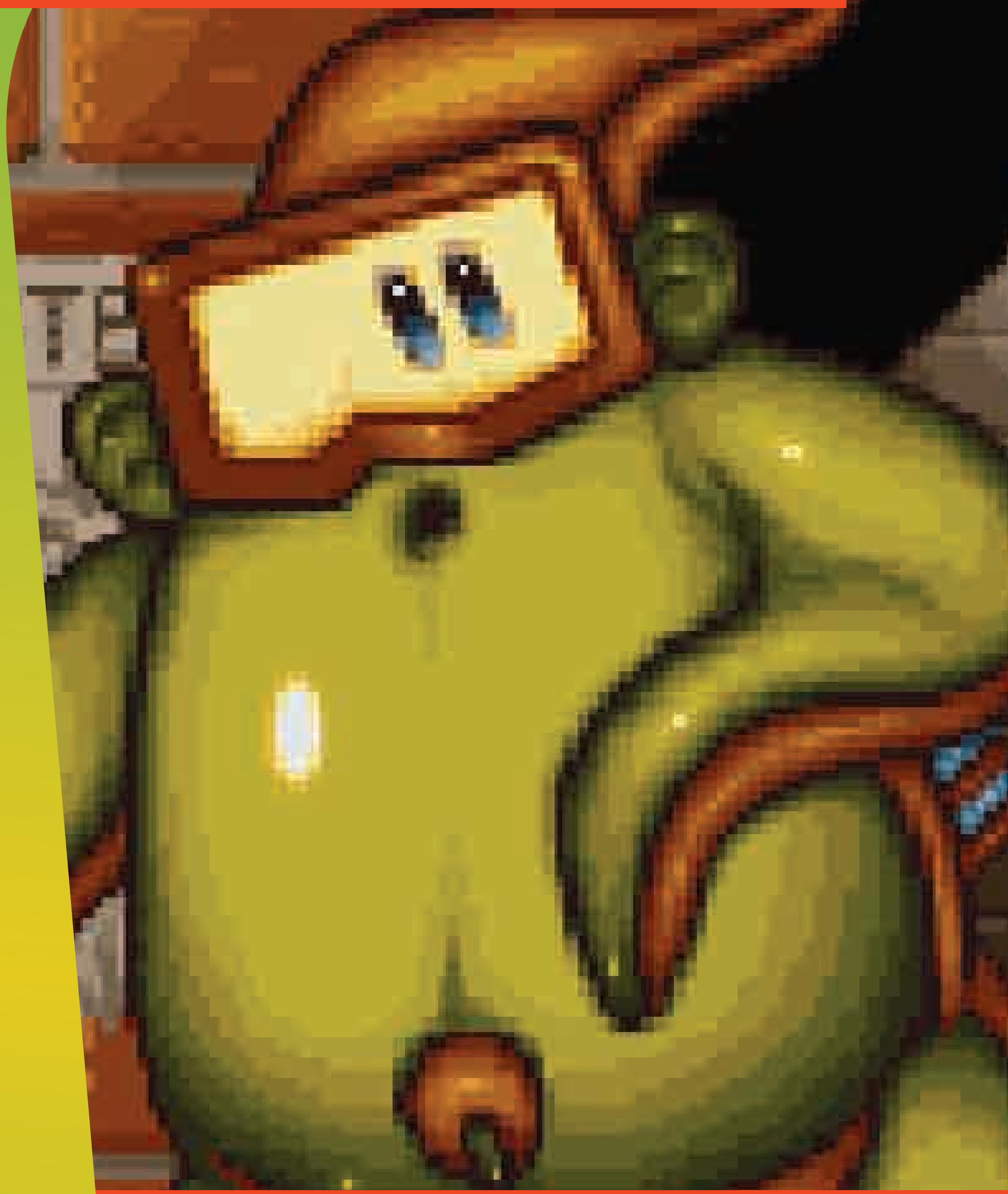
Having reached the surface, he's overcome by a sense of freedom. But what's that noise?



Quiffy turns just in time to see a massive car tyre bearing down on his little green body



The car whizzes by, splattering Quiffy all over the road. Move along now – there's nothing to see here



Spare a thought for poor Quiffy, the portly amphibious star of Bullfrog's Flood. Having worked his way through a dingy underground world, he finally emerges through a storm drain. Only for the unthinkable to happen...